

POPULISM IN POWER: VENEZUELA'S CHAVISMO FROM  
MOBILIZATION TO PARTY BUILDING (1999-2010)

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation contributes to debates about Venezuela's chavismo, the political movement Hugo Chávez led from 1999-2013, and about populism, a contested concept central to comprehending the relationship between institutional breakdown and political change. The introductory chapter proposes a process-based framework for comprehending how populist movements undergo institutionalization in power. This framework interprets populist political movements as organizational phenomena that experience important changes in their character as they govern. The process element concerns the phased nature of populism's development—the ways in which organizational practices shift over time, producing different combinations of mobilization and organization that in turn yield insights into when populism is developing, fully developed, and transitioning into a different phenomenon. The value of this understanding of populism is illustrated through an historicized account of Venezuela's chavismo.

The first two chapters provide historical and ideational background, digging into the institutional context of the preceding two-party democratic system. Analyzing the system's collapse provides insight into both state-society relations before Chávez came to power and some intellectual currents that shaped chavismo. Chapter three shows that the development of chavismo into a case of populism began in 2000-2004 with efforts to establish building blocks for mobilization, a process which entailed using military and civilian institutions to set a foundation for state-society relations. This is illustrated through a study of Hidrocapital, the state-owned Capital region water utility. Chapters four and five trace the development of chavismo into a paradigmatic case of populism from 2005-2007, describing how the dominant intermediation process shifted to mobilizing and organizing base level groups as the country experienced an oil boom. Chapter six analyzes examples of the government layering its political party on top of these base level groups. Chavismo's populism came to an end, I argue, once the movement's leaders affirmed party building goals over state-based mobilization processes for community development.

## Preface and Acknowledgments

The basic idea for this project came to me in April 2002, when I first visited Venezuela as a researcher for the Latin American Program of the Council on Foreign Relations. Two weeks before the visit, simmering tensions gave rise to an aborted *coup d'état* against President Hugo Chávez Frías. The event nearly brought Venezuela to the brink of civil war. The research trip, organized by Julia Sweig, then the deputy director of the Latin America program at the Council on Foreign Relations, allowed me to observe the country's conflict from the perspective of the Venezuela's key political stakeholders.

But, meeting with elites from both sides neglected an important piece of the political puzzle in Chávez's Venezuela—the urban popular sectors that represented a stronghold of support for the government and seemed likely to constitute the chavista movement's social base. With the country very polarized, and supporters from both sides mobilized in the streets, I was able to obtain impressions about this dimension of politics under Chávez but not enough to dig deep into the issues underlying the complex relationship between urban popular sectors and a charismatic leader. Though I had not yet formulated it in exactly these terms, the question I had in mind was whether institutional processes for political and social development would in some way arrange the unmediated forms of support and contestation that were so prevalent during the country's moments of peak polarization. Could something be built amid the disruption or afterwards? Put differently, what does organizing under populism entail, and more specifically, what was distinctive about chavismo's populism as an organizational phenomenon?

Venezuela, with its vast natural resource wealth, recent turmoil amid the collapse of a two-party democratic system that lasted for almost forty years, complex

social system, and important geopolitical position in between the Caribbean and South America, had captivated my interests. I was fortunate to return again in 2004 for a second research trip with the Council. That year the country again came close to conflict during the heated referendum campaign to decide on whether Chávez should be removed from office. Chávez won the referendum and as the dust settled from this electoral contest, possibilities for other changes seemed possible. With rising oil prices—petroleum is Venezuela’s main export and accounts for approximately 95% of the country’s export earnings—and Chávez more stable in power after two major challenges—the coup and this vote—chavismo became an even more tangible reality. I wanted to learn more about chavismo, a movement that, at that time, seemed to have considerable staying power in Venezuela, and stood at the center of developments throughout Latin America.

During graduate school training, under the supportive, passionate, and devoted mentorship of Mimi Keck, I was disabused of two notions about bottom-level processes in contexts marked by top-down ruling frameworks such as populism. One, the processes press accounts commonly described as popular participation were more compellingly understood as instances of mobilization. This subtle but crucial distinction reflected the need for analysis to capture what generated peoples’ movement through vehicles for collective action. Two, collective action is not an ‘either/or’ proposition—i.e., all about resistance or all about the payoffs. In fact, the process was much more complex because collective action is a multilayered phenomenon difficult to decompose into a single cause or interest.

Beyond teaching me that Dahl’s notion of Polyarchy was not just an instance of good scholarship but in fact a very important advancement in democratic theory, Margaret helped me learn how to unpack such complicated processes in terms of their

historically specific conditions and to situate them in theories about agency and institutional change. Above all, I learned to use less theoretical jargon and to try and make sense of what was going on by weaving together the story and then considering what theoretical framework helped deepen understanding of the narrative. Margaret's very helpful interventions and superb intellectual assistance challenged me to move beyond my initial frame of reference. I developed interests about how populist movements organize and incorporate the popular sector actors into political processes. Thanks to her mentorship, I was able to formulate a viable research project about them. I cannot thank Margaret enough, for her friendship and support during this often trying process. She was an amazing advisor and was instrumental in bringing this project to fruition.

The assistance and feedback I received on my grant proposals from committee members Dick Katz, Kellee Tsai, and Debora Poole helped improve the intellectual rigor of the project but also to broaden it so that I could make broader sense of Venezuela's chavismo through comparative theoretical insights about collective action and populism.

Dick never preached about the importance of parties and party building. His questions, however, made me understand that I could not avoid addressing how organizing collective action invariably related to party politics in one form or another. Kellee's insights were critical to helping me situate the project in broader conversations about institutional analysis in comparative politics. She encouraged me to think bigger theoretically and to have the courage to say that what I observed in Venezuela had just as much worth as what others observed in Europe or advanced industrialized parts of the world. Her commitment to the project, even from her sabbatical in Hong Kong, helped me believe in its worth. Debbie and I share a passion for Latin America and for

the popular side of political contestation. Her leadership at the Program in Latin American Studies helped provide me with an intellectual space to develop my ideas and her comments about the project in its early stages helped prepare me to accept that field-work would contradict my theories. This is not an easy process to go through, yet it made me a better researcher and a better scholar. Above all, her critical approach to conventional accounts of chavismo and populism encouraged me to rethink these concepts by analyzing them in a non-ideological fashion. I am very pleased that Joel Andreas, from the Sociology department, could join the committee. His expertise in social theory and contestation in revolutionary regimes will be invaluable to developing this project into its new phase, a book that sets chavismo's populism in the contemporary comparative contexts of Evo Morales's leadership of the Movement toward Socialism party in Bolivia and Rafael Correa's so-called 'Citizen's Revolution' in Ecuador.

Pre-dissertation research grants from the Johns Hopkins University Program in Latin American and its Institute for Global Studies (IGS)—headed at the time by Dr. Debora Poole and Dr. Siba Grovogui, respectively—provided much needed initial funding which I used to establish solid institutional affiliations with universities in Venezuela and begin to craft a viable research project. A letter from University of Notre Dame's Michael Coppedge, one of the most well respected scholars of Venezuelan politics and a top authority on democratization issues more broadly, helped open doors at the Universidad Central de Venezuela's Center for Development Studies (CENDES)—the country's top research center for political sociologists—and the *Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administración* (IESA)—the country's top university for business and public administration.

Among the many receptive faculty members I met at these two excellent research centers, Thais Maingón and Luis Gómez Calcaño at CENDES, and Michael Penfold, José Manuel Puente, and Francisco Monaldi at IESA, became good friends and mentors. They encouraged me to situate the questions that interested me in an institutional setting by identifying specific Chávez government policy that could help ground my research interests.

Miguel Angel Contreras, a post-doc at CENDES who I met through Sujatha Fernandes, suggested to me the idea of studying the *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Committees MTA). Miguel's insights about these groups as organizational phenomenon that first emerged in the early 1990s caught my attention, as the evolution of the groups seemed likely to provide purchase on continuity and change between the pre- and post-Chávez era. Miguel's insights about the MTAs convinced me they were very worthy of study but he did not make this suggestion because he considered them a product of policy.

Only after I thought through what brought the MTAs into existence as a mass phenomenon, a process aided by very enlightening conversations with Venezuelan politics experts Dan Hellinger, Steve Ellner, and David Smilde and discussions on related phenomena in South America with Jonathan Fox, Rebecca Abers, Manuel Antonio Garretón, Marcelo Cavarozzi, Ricardo Guttierrez, Marissa Von Bulow, Carlos de la Torre, Kenneth Sharpe, Maxwell Cameron, Alicia Lissidinni, Annie Gilman, and Todd Eisenstadt, did I come to realize how the story of the MTAs fit into a larger puzzle of institutionalized mobilization under chavismo. A brief exchange with the late Giovanni Arrighi during a JHU Institute for Global Studies presentation of my pre-dissertation field-work findings helped me consider the possibility that community leaders in MTAs would evolve into other political formations—what he called their

next form of ‘political struggle.’ Though I did not fully understand what he meant by new forms of political struggle, he had made me aware of the fact that collective action was not static, but in fact evolves quickly.

This became apparent when I returned to Caracas for an eighteen month-long field stay under the auspices of two grants—one from Fulbright-IIE and another from the Inter-American Foundation’s (IAF) Grassroots Development Fellowship. The support I received from the Fulbright-IIE, administered through the U.S. Embassy in Caracas, deserves mention. The cultural affairs team, in particular James Rodriguez and Angel Garcia, were extremely supportive of independent research and capably addressed consular issues when they arose. The IAF team led by Christian Kasner was a great source of support and provided all the necessary resources to aid my research process. The IAF mid-year conference, a kind of retreat for the Fellowship’s grantees, proved to be a turning point for my research. The opportunity to take a brief leave from Caracas and sit down with senior researchers in the IAF’s network refocused my research project. Discussions with these researchers drove home the need to leave the theoretical debates for the seminar room and concentrate on the craft of field work.

The debt that I incurred during fieldwork and the number of people I can thank for making this trip extremely productive are both too large to mention comprehensively here. I feel it is essential to begin by thanking my adopted Venezuelan family, headed by Isabel Anzola and Alfredo Anzola, a relationship made possible by my friendship with John Heimann and Maria Cristina Anzola. During my initial visits, they opened their doors to their home without really knowing me and allowed me to live with them while I found long-term housing solutions. They also helped me understand the country, its people, and culture. They cheered me on as I investigated



parts of the political landscape they were curious about but did not personally experience.

The friendships I formed with Aime Nogal, Carlos Lagorio, Robert Samet, Benedict Mander, Dimitris Pantoulas, Antero Alvarado, Angel Alvarado, Ivette Carolina Díaz, Carmelo Velasquez, Edgardo Lander, Oscar Reyes, Anibal Guana, Charlie Deveraux, Jose Manuel Puente, Francisco Monaldi, Magally Huggins, Nelly Arenas, Carlos Mascareno, Alexandra Panzarelli, Margarita Lopez Maya, Maria Pilar Garcia-Guadilla, Jorge Diaz Polanco, Angel Garcia, Drazen Maloca, Frederich Welsch, Maria Gabriela Ponce, Ganix Garray, Nohemy Marchan, Kate Burgess, Dan Bristow, Raj Ghose, Adeline Joffre, Xavier Rodriguez Franco, were fundamental in both my professional, academic and personal development while in Venezuela. They all made crucial impacts to the launch of the project and its development. I would also like to thank the staff at both UCV-CENDES and IESA for welcoming me and making my stays there very enjoyable and fruitful.

I was grateful to have the opportunity to meet numerous colleagues conducting very important research on Venezuela while I was in Caracas—among them, Tony Spanakos, Mike Albertus, Kendra Fehrer, Celso González, Samuel Handlin, George Ciccariello-Maher, Alejandro Velasco, Manuel Hidalgo, Juan Carlos Monodero, Enrique Maldonado, Cecilia Cariola, Miguel Lacabaña, Ciro Marcano. This list is likely not exhaustive and I apologize for any omission.

Needless to say, the relationships I formed with my research subjects were central to the project. They were not only the subject of my research, they were individuals with an insightful and personal perspective on the changes that were occurring in their country. I was thrilled, heartened, and grateful that so many people at Hidrocapital and elsewhere in the Chávez government and in the opposition were

willing to listen to me babble on about my research project and its importance when they faced such important daily challenges in government and in their communities.

I was especially grateful to all the research contacts who attended my public talks about my project initial findings, which were held at IESA, the UCV-CENDES, and the Romulo Gallegos Center for Latin American Studies. These were stimulating intellectual exchanges for me. Important and difficult topics were discussed openly and my arguments were received constructively and with goodwill by all concerned, independently of whether they agreed with me or not. In the end, I hope that my initial research may have, in a small way, contributed to enriching the public debate about these issues.

As with many research projects, the key to success is to have access to relevant information. This in turn is not easy to get. I warmly thank all the people who helped with this project on the ground, in particular the ones who went the extra mile to make an interview happen or to help me establish a relationship that opened doors to new information.

Upon returning from field-work, I was fortunate to have some great opportunities to present my work and receive feedback about how to improve it. Only a few of those exchanges are mentioned here. The Program for Latin American Studies at Johns Hopkins provided numerous conference opportunities, the Latin American Studies Association and the American Political Science Association Conferences were invaluable fora as I developed my ideas. I would be remiss if I did not mention the department of political science at the Johns Hopkins University, which provided me with a great intellectual environment for thinking through my fieldwork and relating it to the major debates in the discipline. Mary Otterbein and Lisa Williams, the highly capable administrative staff at the political science department, deserve special

recognition. They ably assisted me with various administrative issues throughout my graduate student career, in particular during the completion of the dissertation.

Three other institutional relationships were fundamental to the success of this research project. First, the Carter Center's Americas program, which allowed me to participate in their electoral study missions to Venezuela's Presidential elections in 2012 and 2013. I am truly grateful to Jennifer McCoy for her mentorship. She trained me to become an electoral observer and helped me become an expert on Venezuelan elections. The Carter Center's Caracas staff, Hector Vanoli and Griselda Colina, were instrumental in helping me to understand how to establish relationships with Venezuelan political elites from the government and the opposition as well as with international community representatives. Secondly, my affiliation with the Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS) as an adjunct professor in the Latin America Studies program—in 2012 and 2013—was a tremendous opportunity for professional growth. Getting to work alongside Guadalupe Paz, Francisco González, Anne McKenzie, and program director Riordan Roett, a great mentor and one of the top Brazil experts of his generation, opened my eyes to new research avenues and encouraged me to think about my project in the broader context of the Andean region and U.S.-Latin American relations. Third, for the last two years, the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies at American University (CLALS), and its Director Eric Hershberg, have provided me with an institutional affiliation in Washington, DC. My relationship with American's CLALS has proved invaluable. Eric and I first met when I worked at the Council on Foreign Relations. Our relationship deepened when he gave me the great opportunity to publish some of my initial findings in a Ford Foundation book project he edited with Kenneth Sharpe and Maxwell Cameron in 2013. Eric and the whole team at AU's CLALS—Jacqueline Dolezal, Ines

Luengo de Krom, Dennis Stinchcombe, Mike Danielson, Rob Albro, Fulton Armstrong, Paula Orlando, Luciano de Melo, Steve Dudley, Yazmin García, Steven Dudley—have provided me with an intellectual home as I revised and wrote up the final chapters of the dissertation. A conference on urban politics organized at AU's School of International Service by Adrienne LeBas and Adam Auerbach provided me a forum to organize my thinking about this research as an example of political ethnography. Leonardo Arriola, the commentator for my presentation at the conference, made very helpful comments for helping me reformulate my claims.

Last, the proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child' may offer a helpful organizing principle for acknowledging the instrumental emotional and intellectual support this project received from friends and family. My different communities of friends in graduate school, from recreation, from my hometown and college, from living and studying abroad, and from my professional engagements all made tremendous differences.

The Cresmont Street barbecue crew—Adam Culver, Cristie Ellis, Chas Phillips, Drew Walker, Dylan Weller, Kevin Darrow, Daniela Ginsburg, Jairus Grove, Jennifer Lin, Jeremy Arnold, Jake Grear, Mabel Wong, Michael Newall, Noora Lori, Stefanie Fishel, Suvi Irvine, Simon Glezos—all made graduate school much more enjoyable. My cohort from the comparative politics subfield, in particular Jeff Pugh, Miriam Mufti, Sara Cerutti, are great friends and colleagues. Giulio de Tommaso, who became one of my mentors after we met through soccer, always believed in the value of field research and in the particular project I chose. When the going got tough, Giulio always told me—'you are going to finish what you started, my friend.'

My close friends from Highland Park, NJ—Aaron, Bret, Chris, Carl, Nasiru, Russell, Jennifer, Jane—and from Bates college—Brad, Dave, Jordan, Molly, Paul and

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My friends in Caracas, Argelys Marquina, Monica Traverso, Rodrigo Anzola, Alfredo José Anzola, Eduardo Anzola, all told me I needed to dedicate more time to learning about the wonderful things Venezuela has to offer, and they were right—it's a beautiful country, with a warm and cosmopolitan people, cultural treasures, and unlimited promise. From professional engagements, my long, great friendships with Cheryl Igiri and Liz Dahan continue to provide everyday inspiration for undertaking a career as an expert in Latin American politics. Julia Sweig, my boss at the Council on Foreign Relations, became a very good friend, trusted advisor, and great mentor. From day one, Julia opened the doors to her home and we became fast friends as I got to know her family and gained a better understanding of what it takes to be a parent, a committed scholar, and a public intellectual. Valentina Socías, whom I met at JHU SAIS, taught me about the importance of dedicating equal amounts of attention to being passionate about politics and being prepared to make productive interventions in politics.

Knowing that all my family wanted me to succeed at this challenging undertaking was the single most important source of support. My extended family showed their love by being behind me every step of the way. My brother Dan knew when to check up on me and when to let me slug it out with a chapter. My father and mother provided the unwavering support I needed to be able to concentrate on the task at hand. Their love, guidance, and friendship made it possible for this project to come to fruition.

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“In the place of Liberalism or Labour, there is an assortment of political movements which, for lack of a better word, have been often grouped under the omnibus concept of ‘populism.’ The term is slightly derogatory, implying something distasteful, disorderly and brutish: something of a kind that is not to be found in socialism or communism, however one may dislike these ideologies. Populism also smacks of improvisation and irresponsibility, and by its nature, is not regarded as functional or efficient.”

Torcuato S. Di Tella, “Populism and Reform in Latin America,” Obstacles to Change in Latin America, Edited by Claudio Velíz 1965, p. 47.

“...no organization of any duration is *completely free of institutionalization*.... As a business, a college or a government agency develops a distinctive clientele, the enterprise gains the stability that comes with a secure source of support, an easy channel of communication. At the same time, it loses flexibility. The process of institutionalization has set in.”

Phillip Selznick, Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation 1957, 16, 7.

“...time is not the medium through which the story of this or that institutions is told; it is itself the central problem.”

Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, “Beyond the Iconography of Order: Notes for a New Institutionalism,” 1994, 330.

## Introduction: Populism in Power: Venezuela’s Chavismo from Mobilization to Party Building (1999-2010)

On March 5, 2013 Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) died after an extended battle with cancer. Chávez’s death sparked discussion of dramatic changes to the country’s political landscape. Most discussions began with the future of chavismo, the charismatic leader-based political movement bearing Chávez’s name. “Chavismo will survive Chávez,” declared the Latin American Weekly Report, “but it is not clear in which form” (LAWR, March 7, 2013, WR-13-09). The reason for the ambiguity seemed clear. Chávez, noted the same article, “provided the glue which held the movement together” (LAWR, Ibid).

From the grave, Chávez made an impact that illustrated his popularity, if not the movement’s dominance. His legacy helped chavismo maintain the support it needed to clear its first hurdle. But, chavismo did not clear the hurdle in clean fashion. Chávez’s chosen successor, Nicolas Maduro, defeated opposition governor Henrique Capriles by 220,000 votes—50.6%-

49.1%. Approximately 700,00 votes changed hands from chavismo to the opposition between the October 6, 2012—Chávez's last election—and April 14, 2013 Presidential votes. Maduro had won the battle but, with the opposition claiming his election was fraudulent, it was not clear if chavismo was still winning the war.

At first blush, chavismo's decreased competitiveness stemmed from Maduro's weaknesses. But upon closer inspection, chavismo's problems ran deeper than Maduro. Very significant changes took place inside chavismo before Chávez died. For example, in order to win the 2012 election by a comfortable margin, Chávez relied on a spending spree, increasing year on year public spending by 45% from 2011 to 2012, and institutional coercion, the abuse of state power to mobilize voters (Carter Center, 2012, p. 47). Chávez channeled these efforts through the *Partido Unida Socialista de Venezuela* (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV), a top-heavy party organization whose elites wielded influence because they had dual roles as senior government officials, not because they were popular with the chavista base. Thus, chavismo's development into a statist phenomenon—a political movement that represented a new system marked by highly centralized decision-making and corruption—began during Chávez's tenure.

To capture the significance of these developments we need to define the term chavismo more precisely. As used here, chavismo does not refer to the doctrine of Chávez but, rather, to the political movement bearing his name. A political movement is different from a political party, though there are important elements in common. Both organizations may compete in elections, organize supporters, and attempt to aggregate voters' preferences into organized interests. But a political movement is something still in formation, a movement for something with organizational appendages. Comparatively speaking, it is not an organizational infrastructure of collective action that includes procedures of recruitment, that specifies rules of membership and seniority, that

publicizes defined policy programs, and that attempts to align members' preferences with a platform and a partisan strategy (Kitschelt, 2006, 278).<sup>1</sup>

Most writing on Chávez terms his political organization as *chavismo*, choosing to not center the organizational vehicles he officially used at election time (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; McCoy and Myers, 2004; Roberts, 2006; Corrales and Penfold, 2009; and Hawkins, 2010). This terminology reflects important realities. For example, the 2007-founded *Partido Socialista Unida de Venezuela* (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV), created by Chávez to integrate support groups, never surpassed *chavismo* as a political brand or organizational force. In the 2012 Presidential campaign Chávez ran on the PSUV ticket. But, voters who supported his candidacy primarily identified as *chavistas*, a trend that showed how supporters affirmed loyalties associated with the Chávez political project or his rule over those cultivated by the party. This distinction between identification as *chavistas* and formal membership in the PSUV party helps capture *chavismo*'s distinctiveness as a political movement and, arguably, its principal limitation as an un-institutionalized governing party. Very simply, this contradiction captures why *chavismo* is compellingly understood as an example of populism, a concept not only defined by ideological tensions between top-down and bottom-up tendencies but also marked by competing organizational processes associated with a spirit of popular mobilization and the imperative of political order.

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<sup>1</sup> An alternative is to describe *chavismo* as a “personalist party”—a “party characterized by 1) imprecise goals and poorly specified formal systems of operation, and 2) a dependence on the personal attributes of one participant (the leader)” (Kostadinova and Levitt, 2014, 500). My point is that a political movement can contain a personalist party but also evoke meanings that surpass those associated with this party's functions.

### *Populism, Charismatic Leaders, and Institutionalization*

Populism constituted one of Latin America's principal patterns in the twentieth century. In South America, arguably beginning with Argentina's peronism, populist leaders have provided a central rallying point around which groups that disagree on other subjects can unite. In this sense, the charismatic leader—whether in Argentina with Perón, in Mexico with Cardenas, in Brazil with Vargas, in Peru with Haya de la Torre, in Ecuador with Velasco Ibarra—is crucial to making a movement possible.<sup>2</sup> But, as Huntington argued in his classic on institutionalization, Political Order in Changing Societies, a political movement dependent on first generation leadership is rigid until it has solved the problem of leadership succession. Put differently, until the movement solves the problem of leadership succession, it is likely to face adaptation challenges. More broadly, it will face serious obstacles to becoming institutionalized through a process by which its “organization and procedures acquire value and stability” (Huntington, 1968, 12-13).

There is little doubt that with authority concentrated in the hands of a single person, chavismo was likely to face difficulties to operating as a collective enterprise in which the organization embodies the values of the movement. Moreover, there are many reasons, not the least of them economic problems and uninspired leadership, why chavismo under Maduro may not endure as Venezuela's most powerful political force. However, not only is it too early to know whether chavismo will successfully adapt, it is also mistaken to argue the movement was free of institutionalization.

This dissertation argues that during particular conjunctures, chavismo entailed a political movement bigger than the sum of its parts. In fact, one of the main reasons scholars have

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<sup>2</sup> Two recent edited volumes deserve mention for the breadth and depth of analysis they offer on Latin American populism. See Conniff, 2012 and Arnson and De la Torre, 2013.

commonly described chavismo as a case of populism is that the movement's organizational processes entailed some creative state-based measures to mobilize the masses through policy programs as well as more traditional clientelistic mechanisms for cultivating loyalties. Put differently, chavismo's status as a paradigmatic case of populism, “the political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge established elites” (Roberts, 2006, 127), is testament to the fact that its organizational processes acquired symbolic value. Moreover, chavismo was in power for over a decade, suggesting it developed other institutionalized elements, such as a core constituency in the military and a social base among popular sectors.

What about chavismo's populism was distinctive compared to other cases of populism? Was chavismo a permanent case of populism, that is, as the movement experienced changes to its organizational structure during Chávez's tenure? When did more creative forms of mobilization peak and what did they amount to—a flash trend, a signature element of the government platform, a consolidated pattern? What does evidence of partial institutionalization reveal about the nature of institutionalization in the case of chavismo and for populism more broadly? This dissertation sheds light on these key questions for advancing our understanding of chavismo, populism, and of mobilizing and organizing under chavismo's distinctive brand of Venezuelan populism.

### *Mobilization under Chavismo: A Movement's Distinctive Competence*

What follows is an interpretive account of chavismo's populism that offers an in-depth study of the organizational dimensions of this populist phenomenon. At its core, the account explores two relationships: interactions between a bottom layer of state officials and base levels of society, and the impact these specific processes of state-society relations had on chavismo. The account tracks these relationships through an intensive examination of both Hidrocapital, the

central government-funded, state-owned water utility for the Capital region of Caracas, and the programs that defined the company's community development policy of *Gestión Comunitario del Agua* (Community Water Management Policy, GCA). Hidrocapital's frontline workers, the state officials charged with promoting the policy programs of organizing *Consejo Comunitario de Agua* (Community Water Councils) water forums and mobilizing *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Committees, MTA), stand at the front and center. The account draws on extensive participant observation of these frontline officials, particularly their interactions with societal participants in these program, and complementary insights from content analysis and elite interviews.

The first half of the project tells the story of GCA policy program implementation in the challenging context of the breakdown of previous Punto Fijo system of party-mediated state-society relations. It situates the principles of these policy programs in the ideational context of the Left's rethinking of the importance of communal based mobilization in light of decentralization and debates in Liberation Theology over a *basista* approach to political empowerment. In describing the bureaucratic routines that frontline workers followed to promote policy I examine how chavismo reconstituted a foundation for state-society relations.

Thus, the account is mainly about state-sponsored mobilization that took place at the base or bottom of society. The idea of base is important in this account because my research on base mobilization there does not refer to the neighborhood or grassroots level. Instead, the account utilizes insights drawn from mobilization targeted at *barrio* populations in squatter towns, which in the urban setting of Caracas constitutes approximately 50% of the population (Baldó, 1994;

Rivas, 2000).<sup>3</sup> Zooming in on this base level provides insight into an arena chavismo assigned priority status in its quest to establish strongholds and a social base.

As exemplified by efforts at Hidrocapital, at the lower echelons of the state pro-Chávez policy officials developed a “distinctive competence” as practitioners of political mobilization (Selznick, 1957, 42). The top-level context of Chávez’s leadership and the existence of resources is crucial to the centering of mobilization and the incentives for engaging in it. But these factors only explain chavismo’s functional competence at accomplishing the regime-oriented mobilization of popular sector actors. To comprehend the distinctive elements of mobilization under chavismo we need to examine other key wrinkles to this story.

To enhance understanding of chavismo, I draw on Selznick’s classic account of organizational character formation. A key part of Selznick’s argument, which is based on studies of policy organizations and Russia’s Bolsheviks, is that actors’ routines are of great importance for comprehending the emergence of organizational character in the field (Selznick, 1957). In other words, it is highly useful to cast light on how an organization’s representatives enact their organizational roles through their routines.

Under Chávez, frontline officials charged with extending services to the poor often, but not always, demonstrated commitments to using specific ways of interacting with popular sector populations and responding to their problems (Selznick, 1957, 40). These were institutional commitments in that officials undertook these efforts with concern for mobilization in a consciousness raising sense. They suggested a normative commitment to, and organizational procedure for, political mobilization beyond the technical task of winning votes or solving discrete problems. In the examples where the elements of this routine became absorbed within a state

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<sup>3</sup> In Venezuela the term *barrio* has a specific class connotation, unlike in other parts of Latin America where the term primarily signifies a place.

institution under central government control, this had impact on what meanings chavismo projected as a political movement. In short, chavismo's distinctive competence at mobilization, an aspect of the movement most visible at the base level, constituted a key part of its social character.

### *Institutional Analysis and Chavismo*

This claim calls attention to two hotly contested debates in what comparative politics scholarship terms institutional analysis. The first debate concerns the relative usefulness of a more Weberian approach to institutionalization that emphasizes a formal system for behavioral routines and procedures and a less formal political sociological approach that unpacks institutionalization as a process that, first and foremost, entails value infusion. The second concerns institutionalization as a partial or complete process, a discussion that in some ways is also about the scales we use to measure political changes and the significance of gradual changes.

I primarily utilize the value infusion approach because state-based efforts to mobilize at the base were essentially about laying a foundation for the construction of a political organization that would strengthen and expand the scope of Chávez's rule. Since there was no party at the center of chavismo until 2008, the routines and procedures of chavista government officials in fact contributed to a better understanding of what it meant to be a chavista. More broadly, with chavismo in formation, and no party structure outlining a formal system, questions of value infusion were paramount.

Institutionalization is often defined as a completed project, that is, by the emergence of an institution that can resist external pressures. Selznick, for example, argues that "where institutionalization is advanced, distinctive outlooks, habits, and other commitments are unified, coloring all aspects of organizational life and lending it a social integration that goes well beyond



formal co-ordination and command” (Selznick, 1957, 40). This definition sets a rather high standard, as implied by the qualifier advanced. The question thus becomes whether institutional analysis is relevant when the entity in question has not achieved full valuation as an institution. I argue it does.

Before elaborating the empirical patterns that underpin this claim, it is useful to consider research that falls under the category of institutional analysis but primarily examines institutional change. Mahoney and Thelen argue that to better account for institutional change researchers need to not only grapple with the puzzle of change and stability as entangled processes but also identify the incremental developments that mark turning points for tracing the gradual process through which changes come to fruition (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Research on major institutional developments in Chinese politics from Kevin O’Brien (1994) and Kellee Tsai (2002, 2006) argues that changes to institutional arrangements initially seemed insignificant. However, the incorporation of seemingly small changes into existing structures resulted in opportunity windows for strategic actors to take advantage of a multi-layered environment.

While the notion of unintended consequences from incremental changes is well established in comparative politics, the point I make here is not so much about institutional change from small-scale developments as it is about institutionalization that takes place on a smaller scale but has significant repercussions. Even when there is not manifest evidence of a movement’s high or advanced institutionalization, institutional analysis remains relevant to capturing its distinctive attributes. Chavismo’s commitment to mobilization captured a portion of the movement’s identity while the military constituted its core constituency, understood as the fulcrum for undertaking strategic maneuvering. Therefore, while mobilization did not color the entire organization, the movement’s distinctive competence at promoting mobilization did capture the specific ways in

which chavismo possessed some institutional value as an organization greater than the sum of its parts. In this sense, chavismo's social character refers to one of the elements that conferred legitimacy on the movement and one of the period's key legacies for Venezuelan politics.

### *Roadmap*

First, I outline what may be termed a process approach to populism. This opens the door to a positive research agenda on populism that calls for scholarship to center the political formations produced by populism, not only the institutions it dismantles and objectives it fails to achieve. Second, I explain the stakes of using different frameworks of institutional analysis and illustrate the implications of following these approaches through reviewing research on Venezuela's chavismo and other important cases of populism. Third, I offer an overview of the project, tracing chavismo's organizational development through the state by breaking down the movement's evolution by phases.

## I. Populism: Toward a Process Approach and a Positive Research Agenda

Populism is a highly common framework in both journalistic and scholarly accounts of chavismo. One literature survey found that between 2000 and 2006 half of the 40 academic journal articles published on Chávez used the word populist or populism (Hawkins, 2010, 6). However, populism is a notably slippery and elusive concept. Describing chavismo as an example of populism does not provide sufficiently detailed insight for identifying when chavismo became a case of populism or assessing the character of its populism. What do we mean when we talk about chavismo's populism (Panizza, 2013)?

### *Commodity Booms and Organizational Patterns*

A political economy approach to Latin American populism, first associated with the hugely influential research of Dornbusch and Edwards (1991), continues to set the standard. This approach certainly has a lot to offer, especially for the case of *chavismo*, which governed under the confines of the Venezuelan petro-state (Karl, 1997), and benefitted tremendously from the 2003-2010 oil boom. For Chávez's government, the oil boom “amounted to gross revenues in excess of 304% of GDP in ten years (i.e. the government received a resource windfall averaging about a third of the economy per year)” (Monaldi, 2013, 3). The boom is the primary reason Chávez averaged a 56% approval rating between 2000-2010, a higher level than other popular Venezuelan presidents (Monaldi, 2013, 11).

More broadly, the government's windfall revenues, and Chávez's highly autocratic style of rule, generated discussion about “rentier populism” (Mazzuca, 2013). Discussing the concept as a regime type best approximated by Venezuela under Chávez, Mazzuca argued that under rentier populism “the ruling alliance comprises only the government and the informal sectors.... The government distributes the revenue from the natural resource to the informal sectors, which comprise a majority of the population... In exchange for redistribution (economic incorporation), the informal sector provides votes as well as ‘street power’ to intimidate economic and political losers (political incorporation)” (Mazzuca, 2013, 114).

The notion of rentier populism helps sharpen understanding of what was similar about ruling patterns in Venezuela under Chávez and in South American countries governed by Left-wing governments. However, it does not interrogate populism's character; it identifies the

conditions that nurture a ruling pattern of Left-wing governance marked by soft authoritarianism. The focus on conditions presumes that populism comes to an end or fades when governments can no longer fulfill this grand bargain. Economic conditions are of course highly relevant. But, the limitation of a political-economic perspective on populism is that it neglects the organizational context through which such a bargain over political incorporation unfolds.

For example, in 2013 and 2014 the international environment still provided a foundation for rentier populism. Venezuelan oil sold at an average of \$99 and \$88, respectively—a rate that ranked practically equal with the peak years of the boom in 2007 and 2008. Meanwhile, the Maduro government continued to distribute social assistance and assorted political pork to its support base among informal sectors dispersed in barrios and depressed rural areas. But, at the same time, major changes had taken place in Venezuela, and not just the qualitative change in leadership summed up by the oft-heard phrase “Maduro *no es* Chávez” (Maduro *is not* Chávez)! Maduro’s tenure overlapped with chavismo’s transformation from populism to an incipient party-state while state spending continued to stimulate consumption booms amid changing economic fortunes.

If populism is primarily a political economic phenomenon, then it arguably continued under Maduro despite the existence of an uncharismatic leader and his administration's weak capacity to mobilize supporters through either mass or community-based collective action. From Chávez to Maduro the key distinction is between a case of populism and a rentier state. Post-Chávez, the chavista movement continued to be conditioned by the structural effects of fiscal dependence on oil rents while a transition in organizational logic from mobilizing to controlling illustrated its evolution into a party-state. In short, a more comprehensive understanding of chavismo's populism requires placing organizational patterns at the center.

To illuminate the value of capturing a political movement's evolution in terms of organizational developments, some comparative analysis may be of assistance. Consider the example of Indonesia under Suharto. Daniel Slater argues that centering analysis on the autocratic style of Suharto not only runs the risk of applying a great man theory of historical causation but also simplifying the leader-masses relationship by neglecting the institutions Suharto built and ruled through (Slater, 2010). Furthermore, Slater argues that narrowing the analytic lens to Suharto and inter-elite regime dynamics blinds us to the signs of internal decay that undermined the regime well before economic crisis caused it to implode (Ibid). In the same vein, it is absolutely crucial to root analysis of chavismo's changes in the temporal and spatial dimensions of the organizational context. Put differently, to fully comprehend chavismo's populism as it initially emerged, developed into a fully developed case of populism, and then morphed into an incipient party-state, the case needs to be situated in the historically layered organizational practices that produced spaces for organizing a political movement.

### *Populism as Process: Intermediation, Mobilization, and Organization*

To help capture populism as a developmental phenomenon, I call attention to the difference between elements of populism and a case of populism. Chávez's charismatic leadership, as well as his strong rhetorical appeals to the people and against the traditional elite, constitute examples of the former. These performative elements of populist leadership became fixtures of the political system during Chávez's tenure. However, this does not mean populism prevailed throughout the political movement's tenure.

To capture populism's development and transformation into an incipient party-state, I draw a distinction between populism as an ideal type societal movement characterized by a firebrand

leader with an anti-system orientation and as a process that can result in what might be called a fully developed or paradigmatic case—populism as “the political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge established elites” (Roberts, 2006, 127). This approach draws on two key principles of case study analysis. One, a case is a “a temporally and spatially bound series of events” (Levy, 2008, 7) that in turn represents “an instance of a class of events” (George and Bennett, 2004). Thus, identifying chavismo as a case of populism implies bounding the political movement in terms of a period marked by distinctive processes. Second, by defining populism as a process we gain analytic leverage for considering it as a developmental phenomenon that exhibits conceptual evolution along a defined scale. This scale is defined by two poles, the positive and negative examples of the case, and the thick grey zone in the middle where the phenomenon is grounded in an empirical context that places it in contact with other processes (Goertz, 2006, 35). For example, populism in its pure positive form entails anti-system reformism, its pure negative form entails a government that represents the system, and its grey zone status is characterized by the movement's efforts to construct a mass constituency from power.

This approach is not only useful for theorizing populism in a more rigorous fashion. It is also rooted in observable empirical patterns. For example, many movements categorized as examples of populism originate as anti-system reformist movements. These examples are typified by movement leaders' claims that democracy needs to be revived by redeeming a lost spirit of popular sovereignty (Canovan, 1999). But, the most influential examples of populism take power, effectively completing a transition from reformism to ruling that means the movement spans two processes—dismantling a system and building a new one (Malloy, 1977). Since it would be confusing to argue that populism is more than one phenomenon at once—i.e., a reformist

movement and a political movement in power—it may be helpful to conceive of populism as a process and track these changes as phases in a process of populist development.

With regards to its phase as a fully developed case of populism—roughly, 2005-2007—chavismo is a remarkable example of organizing support coalitions through the state, that is, without a party. Intermediation is the overarching process that defined chavismo's efforts to organize via the state. Intermediation is commonly associated with research on corporatism, specifically the venues that corporatist systems of interest representation establish for state and societal groups to communicate and negotiate (Schmitter, 1971, 1974). The context of my discussion of intermediation is different since I am not examining chavismo's relationship with an organized sector such as labor or business. Rather, I am examining chavismo's relationship with unorganized, informal sectors in 'barrios'—the Venezuelan term for urban squatter towns.

Moreover, by intermediation I refer to a process, not venues. Intermediation captures the interactive properties of spaces and groups situated at the interstices of state and society. In other words, program-created spaces and groups function as the concrete basis of a larger relational process understood as intermediation—the linking and locking into place of state-society relationships that open channels for groups to express preferences by transmitting demands up the chain and for institutions to shape preference formation down the chain through proposing problem-solving solutions (Schmitter, 1994, 2001). In this respect, it is crucial to specify the policy context and political interests that shape a temporally bound process of intermediation.

### *Theorizing Populism and a Positive Research Agenda on Populism*

Before outlining the three processes of intermediation that exhibited different dominant patterns during the initiation, full development, and transformation of chavismo's populism,

I call attention to two implications of this case study approach that interprets populism as a process marked by different developmental stages. First, one of the main values of an interpretive case study is that it offers in depth analysis of a paradigmatic example of the thematic phenomena. In this sense, a case study helps us not only sharpen understanding of the concept but also offer new descriptive insights for an example likely to set the standard for discussion of the phenomenon. Along these lines, there are important differences between defining a government as populist and describing one of its governing phases as evoking a case of populism. But, to better understand what is specific about populism, I have argued it is also crucial to define populism's antithesis or negative pole as well as theorize its grey zone continuum.

For instance, under Roberts's definition of populism as "the political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge established elites" (Roberts, 2006, 127), Colombia under Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) would not constitute a case of populism. Uribe's leadership was personalistic but he did not contest established elites or mobilize mass constituencies (Bejarano, 2013). The example of Peru under Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) is a borderline case. His leadership was personalistic but his challenge to elites was restricted to traditional political leaders, not economic power brokers, and his promotion of mobilization was largely confined to electoral periods (Roberts, 2006; McIntock, 2013). A false positive case would be Brazil under Lula (2003-2011). Lula's charismatic leadership and relationship with mass populations were embedded in a series of informal accords with business elites and a thick network of party relationships with grassroots affiliates, respectively.

Second, this approach's call to examine the grey zone of populism as an in-power phenomenon has important consequences for rethinking the pejorative connotations associated with populism. The conception of populism as a process raises a key point for research on populism



more broadly. Much writing on populism responds to what De la Torre terms the “negative” research agenda on populism (De la Torre, 2010, 7-10). This negative agenda often involves showing how populism is not democratic, liberal, capable of generating citizenship, or is antithetical to sustainable development (Ibid). The negative agenda has made extremely important contributions, most notably disabusing observers of the ideas that popular participation can be equated with popular sovereignty and that mass participation automatically entails democratization. But, a strictly negative research agenda on populism has limits. It neglects key aspects of politics under populism and impedes progress toward a more comprehensive understanding of populism.

By paying careful attention to the moment when *chavismo* became a case of populism, and illustrating what sequences formed part of this development, we can develop a positive research agenda on populism. The research of Ken Roberts has a lot to offer for thinking about what a positive research agenda could consist of. Roberts analyzes how populist political movements reshape societal patterns of mobilization and organization amid crises of representation (Roberts, 2013). One of his main findings is the existence of a positive correlations between populism and party system regeneration (Roberts, 2015). In other words, when populism is situated within a broader analytic framework and cases are set in their historical context, a different understanding of populism as an intervening political process between deconstruction and reconstruction becomes visible, a point eloquently made by Panizza (2013). Historicizing populism makes it possible to describe populism’s existence in terms of a dialectic between the disintegration and reconstitution of systems of representation, broadly construed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Such a scenario is more likely with cases of populism that entail mass mobilization and organization.

The positive agenda on populism here concentrates on the empirically related but analytically distinct domain of state-society relations. It attempts to develop a better understanding of, on the one hand, what political organizing under chavismo entailed at the base level of state-society relations, and, on the other hand, of chavismo's organizational processes and the political movement's character. As a result, it provides key insights for thinking about the Chávez-created channels of secondary citizenship—the interest group politics bases of representation (Schmitter, 2001). In the context of Venezuelan barrios, channels of secondary citizenship affirmed social issues of community development over civil and political liberties.

Stopping here would be a bit of a injustice to populism's complexity in the Venezuelan case. The historical cases of populism, as analyzed in important volumes from Malloy (1977) and Conniff (2012), illustrated the fact that cases of populism entailed political representation, if not in its liberal form (Weffort, 1994; Stepan, 1978). To move beyond crucial insights about chavismo's populism as an organizational process that operated through mechanisms of social and political development for the lower classes, and improve understanding of this case's broader significance, we need to scale analysis up to the institutional level.

## II. Two Approaches to Institutionalization: Populism's Organizational Sequence

The central contention of this account is that chavismo underwent a degree of institutionalization during its 2005-2007 phase of fully developed populism. What is the significance of this claim for our understanding of Venezuelan politics under Chávez, and what are its implications for political science more broadly? To make clear the contribution of describing chavismo in these terms, and asses the comparative theoretical insights, it is useful to situate the argument in two bodies of literature: critiques of chavismo that argue the movement was free of

institutionalization and research on a classic case of populism that provides crucial insights for better understanding populism's ambiguous relationship to institutionalization.

*Interpreting Institutionalization: The Example of Chavismo*

Beyond the tendency to center a negative agenda, writing on populism is also deeply skeptical about the phenomenon's substantive dimensions. Here the highly relevant point is that political movements led by charismatic leaders face major obstacles to survival once the leader dies (Panebianco, 1988, 167). As a result, populist movements face great challenges on a key dimension of institutionalization—the ability to adapt to new conditions (Huntington, 1968). Hence, if institutionalization refers to a process of the movement becoming entrenched, then populism exhibits structural deficiencies for becoming institutionalized.

My argument operates on a different scale. Chavismo's phase of fully developed populism included a process of the movement acquiring a social character. This gave the organization institutional value. But this identity was contingent on the existence of multiple venues of mobilization. In this respect, noting the temporal nature of chavismo's social character serves to define the historical specificity of the movement's characteristics. By the same token, temporally bounding the claim anticipates the likelihood chavismo will face difficulties in offering a convincing defense of its values and vision as conditions change.

Among arguments that use institutional analysis to examine chavismo as a populist political movement, my claim stakes out new ground. For example, some accounts of chavismo's populism practically deny the possibility of movement institutionalization on any level. Kirk Hawkins, for instance, argues chavismo's populism was antithetical to institutionalization. Focusing on chavismo's ideological worldview and strong rhetoric, he suggests the movement

interpreted collective action through a single lens—crowd actions supportive of Chávez. Populists, he argues, “envision the movement as an enormous assembly that is constantly in session” (Hawkins, 2010, 172), and, accordingly, they promote “disruptive action” to create the impression political participation and crowd actions are equivalent (Ibid, 174). Moreover, he contends that populist movements are defined by their trading of “rational-legal bureaucracy for an enthusiastic army of volunteers motivated by solidarity incentives and devotion to their cause” (Ibid, 171). Similarly, he claims that “in populism, closeness to the people, not professional training, is the basis of merit” (172).

Leaving aside questions about the empirical diagnosis, it is important to underscore problems with this interpretation of what constitutes institutionalization. Hawkins examines institutionalization in terms of the internal rules and procedures followed by chavismo. This diagnosis leads him to theorize chavismo’s internal structure as a weakly institutionalized political organization. But, a diagnosis of chavismo exclusively in terms of its internal routines risks neglecting important aspects. In fact, chavismo did not attempt to operate as a cohesive political organization with official rules and procedures for recruiting supporters, selecting candidates, and promoting leaders until 2008. Chávez outlined a vision for the PSUV at its first meeting in 2007 and then convened the first PSUV Congress of elected delegates in 2008. In this regard, the sequence of organizational patterns is highly relevant. Before considering how the emergence of the PSUV’s formal statutes provided data points on which a dimension of internal institutionalization could be gauged, we need to examine chavismo’s origins as a governing political movement dedicated to political mobilization.

### *A Dual Approach to Institutionalization*

What we need is to step back and rethink what model of institutionalization is at play. As Levitsky notes in his explanation for the transformation of Argentina's peronism from a labor-based to clientelistic-based party, zooming out helps cast new light onto the problem by disentangling two conceptions of institutionalization (Levitsky, 1998). After distinguishing among insights generated by different conceptions of institutionalization, we can aggregate these accordingly.

One conception, which is arguably dominant in political science, pertains to behavioral routinization. It interprets a political movement as an organization with an internal logic observable in terms of its formal statutes and procedures. Let us call this the behavioral routinization conception of institutionalization in which the unit of analysis is presumed to have a coherent internal structure. In the developing world, India's Congress Party, founded in 1885, is commonly cited as a paradigmatic example of an institutionalized political party (Huntington, 1968, 84-85). Another conception, which is more commonly employed in sociology and in studies of organizations more broadly, pertains to what Selznick termed "value infusion" (Selznick, 1957, 42). It interprets a political movement as a whole, and examines relationships between the organization and its members and followers. Let us call this the relational conception. The unit of analysis is the structure of relationships between the movement and participants.

By paying careful attention to changing empirical conditions and bounding insights by phases, we can employ both these conceptions of institutionalization. In other words, these two conceptions of institutionalization are different but combining them can provide complementary insights. A dual pronged approach can help to capture the particular stories of a political movement's different chapters.

Chavismo is an interesting example in this respect. The sequence of chavismo's development, first as a statist phenomenon, and then as a case of populism that developed societal roots through mass mobilization, needs to be considered. If we follow the order of this sequence, then it makes sense to employ the relational conception of institutionalization to examine whether chavismo experienced a degree of institutionalization. That is, what was the nature of the relationship supporters developed with chavismo in the course of interacting through and with it? What value did participants in chavismo assign the organization? Do facts bear out their evaluations? These questions provide insight into the movement's character when the movement lacked a formal organizational structure.

When chavismo became more like a party-state, and the emergence of the PSUV organizational structure gave the movement a degree of coherence, the question of its internal behavioral routine became more relevant. In other words, chavismo's internal behavior routines became more relevant to defining the movement's characteristics. That is, what impact did the routine of performing chavista partisanship through the state, but under PSUV auspices, have for the movement's character?

### *Peronism: Sequence, Movement Character, and Foundational Legacies*

In his discussion of peronism, Levitsky unpacks the concept of institutionalization and calls for scholars to make explicit which conception they are following. This allows him to diagnose as spurious low scores of peronist institutionalization on the dimension of behavioral routinization and identify as meaningful the high scores of movement institutionalization on the dimension of value infusion. Calling attention to this difference allows him to make a basic but very important point. Simply recognizing the existence of these two conceptions of institutionalization gives

researchers the option of making a choice in framework based on a diagnosis of the central trends. When moving to the ground of establishing a descriptive account, it is important to delineate the sequence of a political movement's development before assessing the ways in which it is institutionalized. Moreover, such an analysis will be well served when it centers the relationship between the foundation of a movement and its sequence of development.

Organizational sequence is an implicit point in Levitsky's argument about peronism's endurance during the neoliberal era. Peronism originated as what Roberts termed a case of "labor populism" (Roberts, 2006). Juan Domingo Perón, the leader of peronism (1945-1955), championed the cause of workers and played a key role in cultivating a labor-based coalition as the base of his movement (Gibson, 1996). Moreover, peronism established a constituency of working class sectors before it built a political party structure. Though Perón created the *Partido Justicialista* (Perón's formal Party), it was an open secret that the allied workers' federation, the *Centro General de Trabajadores* (Workers Federation, CGT), ran more of the day-to-day affairs of Perón's political movement. Labor leaders spearheaded electoral mobilization and managed social policy implementation efforts (Roberts, 2006, 131). Thus, Perón's "labor populism" is defined by low levels of party organization compared with high levels of labor organization (Ibid).

At the top, this structure benefitted Perón's personal power over the movement. He was not restrained by a party bureaucracy and relied on the loyalty of the CGT rank-and-file—a segment he personally mobilized into politics while serving as labor minister in a prior government. At the bottom, this arrangement made visible impacts by the way peronism opened possibilities for ordinary Argentines to make social history.

For purposes here, social history refers to the meaning making effects of intersubjective processes between leaders and masses. Daniel James's account, for example, examines the impacts

of Perón's famed discourses regarding the *descamisados* (shirtless workers). James argues that Perón's rhetoric, along with his government's policies, dramatically changed the orientation of popular sectors to the political system, opening up a process of incorporating popular sectors as workers (James, 1988). In other words, workers rationalized Perón's discourses as a series of public celebrations of a popular culture historically denied a prominent place in political life or denigrated by political elites. Such interactions can be generative of recognition politics. Popular sectors developed an identity as workers and thereby gained a basis for comprehending policies benefiting labor as part and parcel, depending on the local ideological context, of either class formation or a political process of integration and incorporation (James, 1988).

Carlos Menem's election returned peronism to power in 1989. Menem performed a bait and switch by following a program of neoliberal reform after campaigning as the supporter of a more statist vision for the economy (Stokes, 2001). This reversal in party platform threw open a debate about what it meant to be a peronist. As Javier Auyero's research illustrates, the movement's survival during its period of neoliberalism is still linked with its origins as a labor-based party of mass rallies and popular participation. For Auyero, understanding the continuity requires rethinking intra-party relations at the base level. He finds evidence that peronism operated through a dual structure of transactionally impactful and socially symbolic relationships at the base level (Auyero, 2001). In other words, as Levitsky argues, peronism exhibited machine-like characteristics as clientelistic distribution superseded universal or policy-based distribution programs (Levitsky, 2003). But these trends did not result in a full eclipse of peronism's social character as a movement of and for the popular sectors (Auyero, 2001).

*Populism's Organizational Limits: The Case of Venezuela's Acción Democrática*



While peronism survived the tumultuous transitions of leadership succession and neo-liberal reform with an important piece of its social character intact, not all political movements identified as cases of populism are so dynamic. Venezuela's *Acción Democrática* (Democratic Action, AD), the social democratic party that served as the country's standard bearer, first in the 1930s and 1940s, and then again during Punto Fijo's two-party democracy (1958-1998), exhibits the organizational limits of a case of populism.

AD's initial rise to power and tenure in government is commonly associated with a period of radical populism (Ellner, 2012). The party's rapid growth, which entailed some signs of personalistic leadership and examples of anti-elite rhetoric, coincided with a remarkable process of political mobilization, in particular among the peasantry (Powell, 1971), but also in urban centers (Ray, 1969; Peattie, 1971). Taking power during the turbulent *trienio* period (1946-1948) that began with a coup, an elected AD administration went on to eliminate literacy standards for suffrage and to champion the working class more broadly. The party's slogan as the party of the people went with a succinct platform—*pan, tierra, y trabajo* (bread, land, and work)! But, AD was also born with a partisan fundamentalism that, from the outset, entailed subordinating mobilization processes to the party's organizational agendas of dominating the main labor and peasant federations and maintaining strict disciplinary procedures that helped the party march to a single drum beat—that of the executive committee. These tendencies resurfaced during the first two decades of Punto Fijo democracy (1959-1998), and AD in fact lost a wing of important student activists to the guerrilla struggle and Leftwing parties. In the 1980s and 1990s these tendencies hardened. The party became the largest social democratic party in the world, if measured by formal membership, and, at the same time, a hollow institution (Coppedge, 1994).

AD's evolution seems to map out as an example of a populist political movement transformed into a machine party organization over the course of five decades. But the story is more complex. AD's initial experience in power challenged the movement's ability to sustain a commitment to mobilization as it faced the exigencies of maintaining power and providing political order. In this respect, AD's use of the state to strengthen its coalition reveals the fact that its populism started in the grey zone between an anti-system movement and a system guardian because the organizational conditions had already developed to a point where a solid foundation for state society-relations existed and the party was able to shape civil society institutions at their founding moments (Levine, 1978). Moreover, AD's affirmation of centralized hierarchy over mobilization and party discipline over pluralism placed the organization on a developmental path to high institutionalization in terms of internal routine and procedure. Along the way, its social character, always at tension with the goal of party building, decayed. Early on, populism reached its organizational limits and then faded as AD began to rival a party state.

### *Populism's Grey Zone, a Positive Agenda, and Institutional Analysis*

Many scholars have commented on the difficulties of pinning populism down (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969). These observations were on the right track but progress can be made by distinguishing between populism as a movement seeking power and those in power. In the same vein, it is crucial to theorize the grey zone area of populism as a phenomenon that has an uncomfortable relationship with institutions but is nevertheless subject to them. Populism's initial appeal may stem from its challenge to the establishment but once it gets to power there is no turning back from the institutional puzzle.

If this review can claim to have made contributions to our understanding of populism, they begin at the level of enhanced awareness. Hopefully, we now have a better idea why populism has an ambiguous relationship with institutions, if not a full understanding of whether populist movements' leaders ambivalence toward institutions is a reflection of their hunger for power or their commitment to some ideal of popular sovereignty. Moreover, by situating populism in the grey zone, we gained an analytic basis for examining populism's positive agenda as an organizational process of building forms of support and ruling through these. Last, though we should not expect a consensus on what framework should be used to determine whether populism is institutionalized, a discussion of populism's institutional dimensions helped pinpoint how institutional analysis can help us gain traction on fundamental aspects of the concept.

### III. Organizational Structure and Character: Chavismo in Three Phases

Chávez filled a leadership vacuum while chavismo emerged in the context of a system collapse that created major challenges for reconstituting state-society relations. Intermediation in the Punto Fijo system of two-party democracy involved a pattern of party-mediated state-society relations and at the base of the system this resulted in party-permeated stateness. Generally, this pattern meant the following sequence applied in a wide range of arenas—where there existed state presence, the state institution that had organizational capacity to reach down into society and shape affairs there probably obtained this means to govern after party mobilization and penetration of societal spaces had taken place. This was a perverse kind of stateness. But, it nevertheless provided a means for connecting the bottom to the top and for incorporating population into important parts of the political system, from voting to welfare goods. However, it was not a particularly strong arrangement since it relied on parties, not on the state's autonomous legitimacy to extract resources

in exchange for protection. Beginning in the mid 1980s, when the economy faced major headwinds and parties collapsed, this resulted, as I argue in Chapter one, not only in the breaking apart of party-mediated state-society relations but also in a disjuncture between state and society that entailed state institutions withdrawing from societal spaces.

The efforts to fill these spaces initially began amid Punto Fijo's collapse. Organizational efforts that had direct impacts on chavismo came from the Left. These took root at the local level, an arena in Venezuelan politics created by decentralization reforms that aimed to save the Punto Fijo democracy from itself. Chapter two describes the intellectual context of the Left's new approach to mobilization at the local level by retracing the trajectory of basismo, a philosophical approach to political action premised on belief in the poor as the prerequisite to effective action for the poor (Lehmann, 1992). It then examines the link between basismo and one of the main roots of chavismo, *La Causa R* (The Radical Cause, LCR), a party that emerged from efforts to promote new trade unionism in industrial centers and to promote a political organization based on the idea of a movement of movements in urban shantytowns (Lopez Maya, 1997). The LCR was able to fuse basismo with its efforts to develop a national level political organization because decentralization reforms provided electoral opportunities for alternatives to win office, as happened in Caracas with the Mayor's office of Libertador municipality.

Under Chávez, the reconstitution of state-society relations began to take shape with his efforts to 'civilianize' the military and place them on the front lines of his social assistance efforts (Norden, 2003; Trinkunas, 2004). But civilians were also present on the front lines, as demonstrated by the case of Hidrocapital. One advantage of this dissertation's in-depth research into Hidrocapital officials' street level routines for recruiting leaders and mobilizing collective action is that this historical approach allows us trace these state-based efforts over time, as the

utility promoted the same policy programs as their centerpiece contribution to community development from 1999 until 2010. The continuity of these programs does not mean they were immune to change. Rather, it means that Hidrocapital's history provides us with insights into how government programs for *Consejos Comunitarios de Agua* (Communal Water Councils, CCA) and *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Committees, MTA) were shaped by changes associated with broader evolutions in the organizational patterns that characterized state-society relations in different junctures. These insights are useful for complementing our knowledge about the military as chavismo's core constituency throughout the government's tenure. They help us make better sense of how chavismo developed into a movement from power and through multiple venues of mobilization crafted from above.

Chapter three paints a portrait of Hidrocapital's Community Water Management policy and its implementation through street-level promotion routines from 1999-2004. At the front and center are the main organizers of mobilization in the Caracas water sector, the team of front line officials at Hidrocapital that, knowingly or not, applied some of basismo's teaching through their professional routines. Some front line workers at Hidrocapital had been recruited to work for the Chávez government through the relationships they formed as participants in LCR governance experiences. Indeed, the LCR Mayor of Caracas went on to become a Minister of Education in Chávez's first government after serving as President of the Constituent Assembly that drafted the country's new Constitution in 1999. His appointment helped recruit water engineers and urban planners that had formed informal policy networks with community activists during the LCR government. These networks provided the recruiting grounds for Hidrocapital's Chávez-appointed President to put together her team for the newly created Community Management office—the group that first promoted *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Committee, MTA) in 1999

through a gradualist strategy of repairing the utility's reputation through community outreach and cultivation of strategic relationships with barrio leaders. In some cases, front line workers performed these tasks in arenas they knew from their backgrounds in political organizing or community activism. Their roles as state organizers seemed to be a good use of their expertise in mobilization at the same time as it implied a transition from demanding responsiveness to being responsible for institutional responses.

More broadly, Hidrocapital officials' implementation of GCA policy programs from 1999-2004 illustrates the first of three intermediation processes that shaped state-society relations under chavismo. Each process had a different dominant pattern. The first process entailed establishing a foundation for state-society relations. In the context of Caracas water sector dynamics, intermediation featured a dominant pattern of government officials reestablishing state presence through community outreach programs that attempted to include popular sector actors in policy processes by generating a sense of symbolic recognition.

To trace this process of intermediation and pattern, I describe the routines of Hidrocapital policy spokespersons and frontline officials engaged in the day to day effort to promote policy. I then unpack the routines into two main parts, community outreach and direct policy dissemination, and illustrate what narratives officials told and tactics they employed in the course of installing these policy programs. Hidrocapital's interest in re-establishing institutional presence in these spaces was a driving goal throughout this process. Moreover, establishing state presence went hand in hand with developing a repertoire for state-society interactions that sought to generate a sense of symbolic recognition among a previously neglected population. Hidrocapital officials had a specific instrument for sharpening their claims they were not only interested in improving the state's reputation. The policy programs of installing *Consejos Comunitarios de Agua* (Community

Water Councils, CCA) and *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (MTA) entailed a procedure of state promoted mobilization—recruiting community leaders and thirsty barrio residents to the CCA water forums and framing the three step procedure for forming an MTA—a) completing a census of local water users, b) drawing an informal map of the local water network, and c) submitting a diagnosis of the problem to the state—as an opportunity for community development to take place as popular process of collective action. Though state officials promoting the MTAs defined these groups differently, they all agreed on the importance of framing them as opportunities for mobilized communities to not only benefit from development but to somehow play roles as the agents of development. With the MTAs, Hidrocapital officials made some headway in outlining a framework for people to join up in an effort to promote collective solutions to collective problems. But beyond the existence of petitioning groups it was not clear how to structure these groups in relation to collective decision-making beyond the block level. In other words, the MTAs captured a midpoint between mobilization and organization.

To advance this discussion about collective action in state-promoted communal-based groups it is necessary to define these two key terms—mobilization and organization. Paraphrasing Nettl, political mobilization can be defined as the inducing of a commitment to action and translating that attitude into observed public behaviors informed by norms (Nettl, 1967, 32-33). Thus, mobilization is not only a process of putting something into motion—when people with initiative come together and when that “group goes from being a passive collective of individuals to an active participant in public life” (Tilly, 1978, 69). It is also an end for a policy or a political project. By comparison, organizing involves the arranging or assembling of people into an “orderly structured whole” (Roberts, 2006, 130) in which the group is marked by both a defined basis for

inclusion in group actions and express signs of "differentiation, centrality, and stratification" (Tilly, 1978, 64).

An explicit distinction between mobilization and organization is a useful tool for comprehending collective action processes and the nature of state-society interactions. However, this distinction is not always easy to track in practice. For example, some groups encompass both mobilization and organization. Moreover, the implications of this distinction are not completely clear. For example, if we follow Weber's definitions of "political activities" as those actions "likely to uphold, change or overthrow, to hinder or promote" authority relations, it seems plausible to imagine any or all of these activities taking place under mobilization or organization (Weber, quoted in Jansen, 2011, 82). In this sense, the institutional context is crucial for distinguishing the implications of mobilization and organization.

The complicated task of making sense of state-sponsored collective action receives front and center attention in Chapter four, an account that covers 2000 to 2006 but primarily addresses the massification of collective action in 2005-2007. The first part of the chapter involves mapping the different collective action processes promoted by the Chávez government between 2000 and 2006. This helps distinguish the impact of different groups and the meanings associated with their activities. More broadly, this mapping provides a baseline of insights for depicting the context of this arena of state-society interaction more clearly. I note existing processes of community development and collective voice and the primacy of the former over the latter. Likewise, I call attention to policy events—laws, new rule frameworks, changes in procedure—that, from above, affected the strength of existing processes. Considering this arena in terms of interaction between embedded processes and policy events allows us to carefully diagnose the nature of change,



separating out discrete examples from trends and distinguishing trends from the more dominant patterns.

The first policy event is Chávez's 2005-2006 promotion of direct development as a formula of community development that entailed providing grants to community groups and permitting these groups to manage funds at their discretion. In 2006 the process of material distribution grew much more structured when Chávez called for the fusion of thematic groups—the MTAs and *Comités de Tierra Urbana* (Urban Land Committees, CTU)—into the territorially organized Communal Councils. The second policy event refers to Chávez's political promotion of the Councils. Chávez directly inserted them into the national political debate, first as parts of his vision of direct government, and second, as key players in his political project, which that year focused on reforming the Constitution. All groups received funds through the same formula of state facilitated community development grants but there was great variation with regards to how development took place.

There are two key distinctions for capturing this variation in collective action. The first concerns the difference between conventional community development, in which there is a sponsor and a recipient groups but the main process involves development for the community, and popular development, in which the same procedure of donation to a group exists but the main process involves examples of development by parts of the community or development that takes place publicly. The second concerns the orientation of the collective voice expressed by these groups. The work of O'Donnell is very useful here. O'Donnell draws a distinction between horizontal voice, which essentially refers to a societal-centric phenomenon of previously unintegrated actors developing a social identity that can guide collect action, and vertical voice, which refers to addressing powerful holders to try and hold them accountable in some sense (O'Donnell, 1999).

Horizontal voice tends to be undervalued in contemporary discussions of popular voice that draw links between the strength of voice and democratization (Tilly, 2007). Its value is more about how social cohesion can change a community's developmental path (Hirschman, 1984).

The second section of Chapter four provides insights that help us account for why community development tended to result in barrio groups managing development funds with near complete discretion, often at the expense of efficient development projects. Through content analysis of Chávez personally awarding projects grants to MTAs, I illustrate how he developed four principles for action that state officials—present at the conference where Chávez outlined these points—went on to implement through administrative procedures. The mother of these principles of action is captured by Chávez's declaration that community developments “cannot fail,” a premise that set a dangerous precedent of prioritizing development over the regulation of development. In this sense, Chapter four illustrates how intermediation shifted from a process of establishing a foundation for state-society relations to one of building a social base for the government through an unfolding organizational pattern that entailed elements of mobilization and organization.

Chapter five chronicles a relative success story. It offers a case study of the state's central role in community development under Chávez through the example of a MTA in El Rosario-Santa Cruz, two adjoining barrios in the eastern part of Caracas. MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz received development funds from Hidrocapital—from the same budget Chávez initially approved for the groups in 2005—and executed its water repair project in a manner that can plausibly be described as an example of popular development. The chapter makes use of the notion of facilitative leadership—a term Ansell and Gash have recently proposed to help us think about collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2012)—to help illustrate the fact that popular development was not

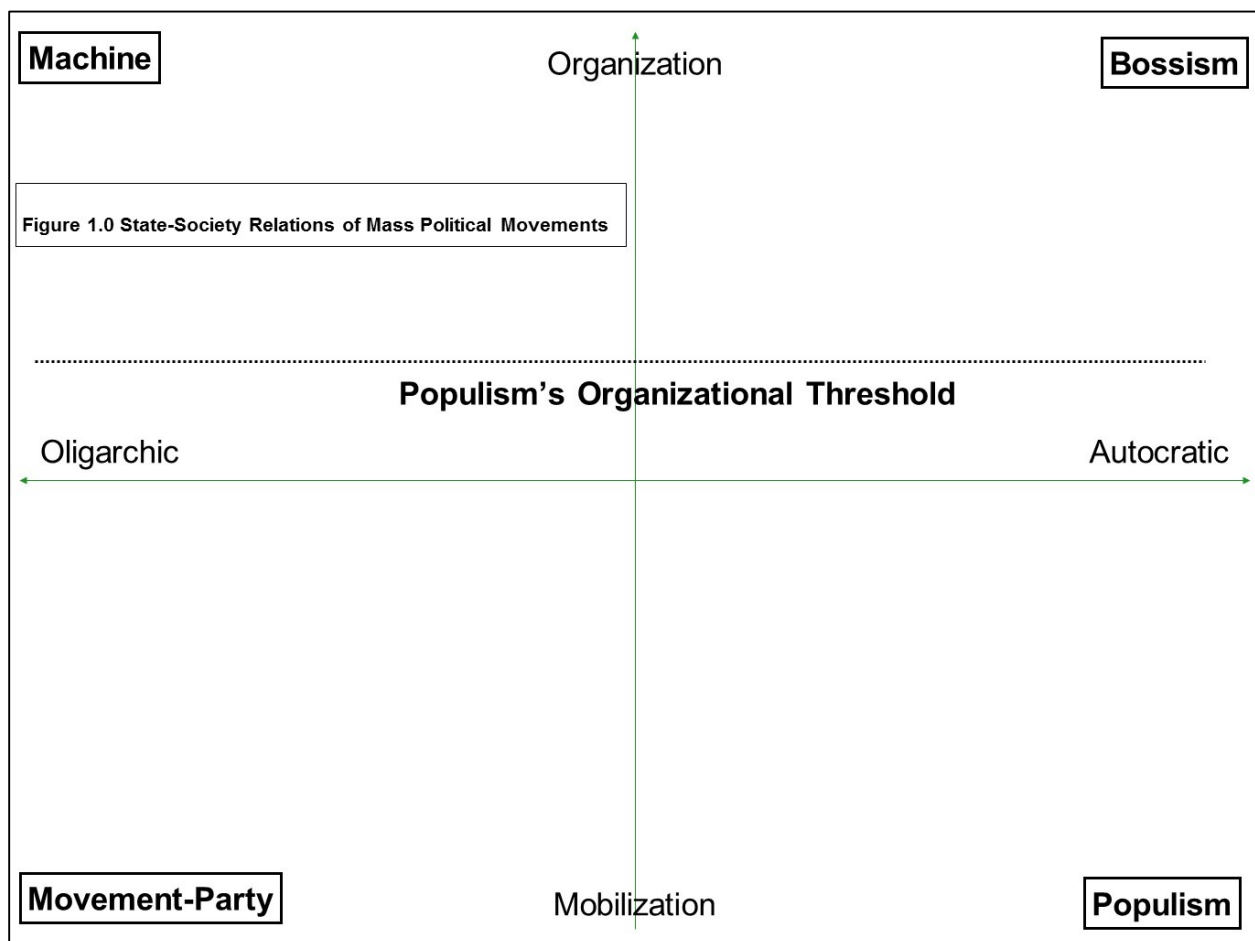
a societal phenomenon. Community leaders of the MTA served as catalysts for the community level processes of collective action that needed inspired support from locals and the frontline officials provided the stewardship that protected the integrity of the principles behind these policy programs and situated interactions in the broader context of political incorporation.

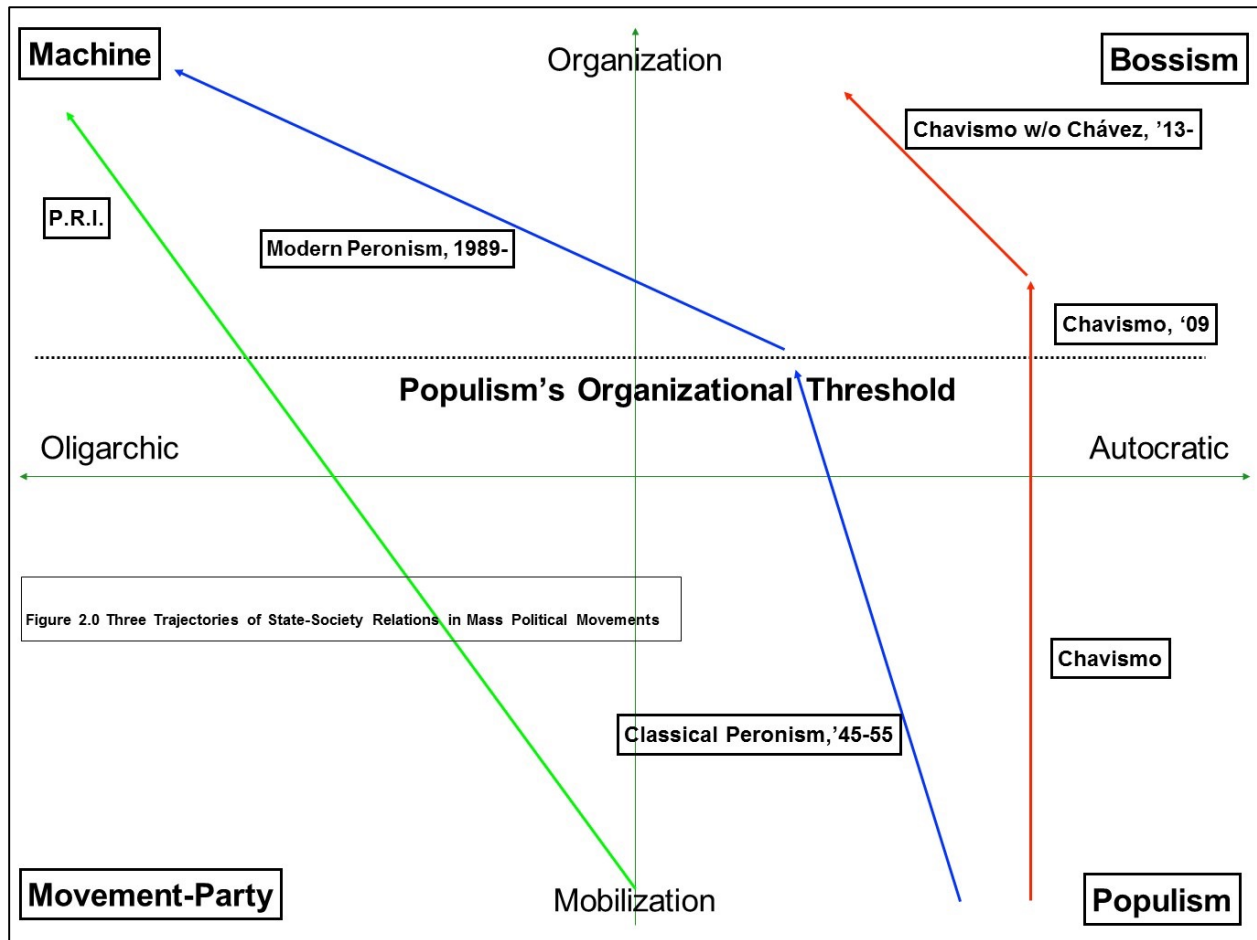
After winning reelection to his second six year term (2007-2012), in 2007 Chávez began to build the *Partido Socialista Unida de Venezuela* (United Socialist Political Party of Venezuela, PSUV) to facilitate the construction of ‘Twenty First Century Socialism.’ Meanwhile, as oil prices continued to rise in 2007-2009, the centrality of the state to chavismo increased dramatically. Chavismo reaped the benefits of an oil boom, and the oil boom changed chavismo, as predicted by the history of oil booms effectuating regime-changes in Venezuela and elsewhere (Karl, 1997). Chávez’s PSUV party, which in 2008 held its initial Congress and participated in its first elections, operated from within the state. The initial evidence of a party-state emerged before. In 2006, the President of state oil company P.D.V.S.A. Minister Ramírez informed PDVSA employees the company’s spirit was “*rojo-rojito*” (red, completely red). Chávez began appropriating red as his partisan symbol in 2005 and the PSUV adopted the color as its defining symbol. Ramírez’s comment constituted a thinly veiled threat—those who opposed an aligning of partisanship with the company’s procedure of doing business risked being fired.

The ascendance of the party implied changes to the structure of partisanship and this led to important changes in chavismo’s organizational structure and character. Partisanship was no longer a matter of loyalty to Chávez. Performing partisanship was a multi-layered procedure. Partisanship was a matter of demonstrating loyalty to Chávez through explicitly administering the state under the auspices of the PSUV, the only revolutionary party licensed by Chávez to appropriate public office. Demonstrations of partisanship through acts that symbolically

performed party loyalty and political discipline gained currency as the accepted means for illustrating what it meant to be a chavista. In short, between 2007-2010, chavismo transitioned from a populist political movement marked by dual processes of mobilization and organization into a party-state marked by the emergence of a party machine. With some exceptions, intermediation became a process for linking state and society together to build a party.

Thus, in the broad scheme, the dissertation tells a story about chavismo with three main parts—from 1999-2004, the rebuilding of state-society relations after a system collapse created a disjuncture between the bottom and top, from 2005-2007 the Chávez and state-promoted process of mobilization that gave chavismo its distinctive characteristics, and from 2007 to 2010 the changing character of chavismo as a political movement that became marked more by dogmatic demonstrations of partisanship than by procedures that conveyed commitment to principles of political action not only for community development but also by and for popular sector actors.





“Not even one district, not even one municipality without a party office.”

Rómulo Betancourt, 1956, 135, President of Venezuela, 1959-1963

“Not even one trade union, one guild, or one peasant organization without a party office.”<sup>5</sup>

Diego Bautista Urbaneja, 1992, 100

“Reform or Constituent Assembly? Here lies the substance of the debate in this moment of crisis. Reform and Constituent Assembly can have the same ends, if deliberation predominates and if the leadership exercises its capacity to steer.”

President Carlos Andrés Pérez, March 12, 1992, quoted in José Virtuoso, SIC April, 1992, 112

## Chapter 1: Party-Permeated Stateness: Punto Fijo Democracy in Urban Barrios

On February 4, 1992 Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez burst onto Venezuela's national political scene as the leader of a failed *coup d'état*. Chávez led the underground military group *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario-200* (Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200). This group, Chávez believed, was continuing independence hero Simon Bolívar's struggle for sovereignty and justice. Chávez paid for his actions with jail time.

Nevertheless, the image of Chávez, the young Army Officer who cut a sharp profile in his paratrooper unit uniform, endured. Chávez figuratively outlasted the coup in part because he gave a memorable surrender speech on national television (Marcano and Barrera Tryska, 2006, 74-75). Beyond gaining visibility, Chávez became a folk hero whose appearances generated flash mobilizations of lower class Venezuelans (Karl, 1997; Coronil, 1997; McCoy, 1999).

When Chávez's image resonated in popular culture, two interpretations of its significance grew prevalent. Roughly, Chávez either projected a cartoonish reflection of the growing unrest

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<sup>5</sup> Bautista Urbaneja argues this quotation captures the practice followed by Betancourt's *Acción Democrática* in its efforts to create territorial and social presence (Bautista Urbaneja, 1992, 100).

with a two party democracy (1958-1998) or he embodied the insurgent patriot. Commonly, these differing perceptions broke along class lines.

An anecdote suggests that for many in Venezuela's upper class, Chávez was a clown, not a challenger worth taking seriously. Weeks after Chávez's coup, some Caracas elites gathered at a seaside apartment complex for a Carnival party. A group of adolescents dressed up in costumes meant to mimic Hugo Chávez. To get in costume they colored their skins brown to adopt 'Hugo Chávez's color.' Setting aside the racial politics and crassness of 'brownfacing,' the idea of kids dressing up for Carnival as a jailed coup conspirator could itself have elicited outrage. The problem is, it did not.

Venezuelans self-identify as informal folks prone to jest about even the most serious subjects. This lighthearted informality is a trademark idiosyncrasy. They also take pride in putative racial exceptionalism—"a coffee with milk" tapestry of racial coexistence (Wright, 1990). But, none of this takes away from the main point: Chávez's figurative presence at this Carnival party bespoke flatly political issues. This crass folk heroization of Chávez symbolized a complacently adrift elite political culture. Evidently, some elites failed to grasp the grave problems Chávez's coup posed for the stability of two-party democracy. They paid a high price for this blindness.

Meanwhile, the popular sectors that saw a reflection of their selves in Chávez were in some ways entranced by this mirror image. Yet, crucially, Chávez was seen as more than a man of "humble social origins" who had darker skin than "most high-ranking military officers" (Coronil, 1997, 379). The nationalist sentiments he stirred help explain his subsequent success as an outsider candidate. Coronil's description of Chávez as the "avenging champion" (Coronil, 2008, 3) is particularly telling. It casts Chávez as the symbol of the proverbial revenge, a figure not only desired by the underclass but also by middle and professional class sectors disenchanted with

established institutions of the so-called ‘Punto Fijo’ system under which a two-party democracy operated between 1959 and 1998. The multi-class support Chávez received in the 1998 elections is some indication that a fairly diverse range of actors felt Colonel Chávez merited serious attention for a simple reason. As a shantytown dweller explained patiently to an interviewer, “I support Chávez because he is a change. We need changes” (Márquez, 2003, 197).

### *Punto Fijo to Chavismo: State-Society Relations and the Stateness Linkage*

The Chávez phenomenon posed a great puzzle. After nearly four decades of Punto Fijo democratic rule, how did a coup conspirator acquire folk hero status, and then take the country by storm? Accounts of Chávez’s political ascendancy tend to be of two varieties. They either use the lens of institutional collapse (McCoy and Myers, 2004; Morgan, 2009) or of social polarization (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003) to explore fundamental changes in the landscape of political institutions and social relations, respectively.

My central interest is in deepening understanding of chavismo’s emergence as a case of populism, that is, as process: “the political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge established elites” (Roberts, 2006, 127). Chavismo’s populism materialized, I argue, through the Chávez government’s use of state power. The objective in this chapter is to establish historical patterns about pre-Chávez governments’ use of state power. Institutional and social elements are highly relevant but primarily in so far as they relate to state-society relations. To draw linkages between, on the one hand, the collapse of Punto Fijo institutions and the disintegration of social relations, and, on the other hand, the Chávez government’s initiation of state-based popular mobilization, I trace the emergence and breakdown of party-mediated state-



society relations at the base level. Thus, the main pattern is the varying character of stateness at the base level.

*Stateness: The Breadth and Depth of Presence and Protection*

The first dimension of stateness is the breadth of formal state presence. Very simply, presence refers to a degree of territorial penetration by the state. This is the key component in conventional Weberian definitions of the modern state as the unifying compulsory organization exercising effective sovereignty over the national territory through the monopolization of violence (Weber, 2009). This definition implies extensive state reach over territory, and conceives the state as the rule of law and order. The second dimension of stateness is institutional depth. It refers to two intertwined issues: criteria of national citizenship and state-society interactions regarding governments providing protection in exchange for extracting revenue (Tilly, 1985). In this vein, modern national states are distinguished by their institutional capacities at the interstices of state and society.

Michael Mann's notion of state infrastructural power is useful for gaining analytic leverage on the challenges states face to building the regulatory capacities that create such depth (Mann, 1986; 1988). Studying state infrastructural power requires examining arenas of regularized interaction between governmental and non-governmental collectivities (Soifer, 2008; 2009). A key issue is sequencing—adding layers of depth to a state with a wide spanning frame. I slightly reformulate infrastructural power by discussing infrastructural capacity. This reformulation has theoretical value on two levels. First, since infrastructural capacity is unlikely to develop in a seamless or progressive sequence, a sensible research strategy is to break the process down into components. Drawing on Centeno and Ferraro, I consider four arenas of state-society relations as

germane to infrastructural capacity—revenue raising, administrative coherence, policy effectiveness, and legitimacy (Centeno and Ferraro, 2013).

Second, the reformulation facilitates disaggregating infrastructural capacity in terms of its institutional source and functional effects. It seems controversial to consider parties as potential sources of infrastructural capacity. But, this alternative proposition is consonant with the spirit of the operative process evoked by the term. Infrastructural capacity is manifest when peak institutions regulate and mold society while fulfilling functional tasks in society. Thus, political parties—not only the state—may undertake activities that give rise to the emergence of infrastructural capacity. However, their contribution is indirect and contingent. Parties can contribute to infrastructure capacity by promoting policies that serve state building ends.

If parties performed activities that integrated base level groups into state policy plans, then they were fulfilling important functions that are infrastructural in nature. There is an important difference, however, between accomplishing integration and creating a basis for sustained institutional integration—that is, for the practice to occur as a part of standard procedure. For example, if a party promotes integration of the peasantry with an eye toward helping its rural constituency acquire franchise and social rights but it does not help establish a revenue extraction system that can help provide a fiscal surplus for skills training or further education, then it has not created a state intermediary that can provide a safety net once inspired party leaders fade. In other words, there needs to be some kind of transfer of responsibilities to the state in order for the parties' public contribution to truly be understood as making an infrastructural capacity impact. Capacity refers to the ability to produce, not fulfilling of functions on a discrete basis.

### *Party-Permeated Stateness*

Conceiving of infrastructure power as infrastructure capacity also serves a specific purpose in the context of this study. Venezuelans have long lived under a petro-state (Karl, 1997; Coronil, 1997). The Venezuelan petro-state refers to an arrangement where the state runs the economy through institutions that capture and distribute oil rents. Despite its considerable size, this state structure was surprisingly weak at regulating society. Thus, creating institutional depth posed the greatest challenge in the Venezuelan context.

Parties compensated for the state's lack of institutional depth. Venezuela's so-called Punto Fijo system (1958-1998) featured an extreme form of two party democracy—a partyarchy in which two parties ruled (Coppedge, 1994a). Center-Left AD and Center-Right COPEI exerted widespread control over the state and shaped state-society relations to their benefit. This created a situation of party-mediated state-society relations. AD and COPEI fulfilled some infrastructural functions while establishing organizational presence in newly formed barrios. Crucially, parties established presence with a much different set of interests in mind than those that theoretically motivate civil servants. As a result, parties made important, but highly incomplete, contributions towards integrating top and bottom layers of the political system. For example, the petro-state gained mythical status at the level of public sentiment (Coronil, 1997) but enjoyed “much less legitimacy” at the level of gaining social license to regulate through taxation (Adelman 2006, 42).

At the base level, party-mediated state-society relations took a specific form. ‘Base’ here refers to the human geographical elements of ground-level places, not administratively defined levels such as township or district. This understanding is broadly consonant with the Latin American Spanish usage of *base* that evokes the sociological idea of a group rooted in the popular or lower class sectors—i.e., the base of society. Within this understanding of base, I examine the

level of urban barrios, which in Venezuela refer to squatter built neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup> Party-permeated stateness in the informal barrios, I contend, is the dominant pattern of party-mediated state-society relations. Parties penetrated arenas of state-society relations on both sides of the public-private divide, creating a situation where these institutions worked in tandem with the state in society and penetrated inside the corridors of institutional decision-making. Stateness existed at the base level but this was established on the backs of party institutions.

### *Roadmap*

The first section reviews classic formulations of the state and relates these to contemporary discussions of state capacity and stateness. It then outlines a research agenda for examining stateness by unpacking infrastructural capacity into four tractable arenas. The second section recounts Punto Fijo's rise and fall while tracing party-mediated state-society relations and party-permeated stateness in urban barrios.

## I. The State, State Capacity, and Stateness

Weber's 'modern' state can be succinctly defined as a "compulsory association which organizes domination" (Weber, 2009, 82). What makes the state a compulsory organization? The answer concerns coercion; where there is a state, the administrative structure and legal order "has been successful in seeking to monopolize the legitimate use of physical force as a means of domination within a territory" (Ibid). Thus, the state's monopoly control over the means of violence underpins this binding authority (Ibid). In this conception a state is something bigger than a government. But, its structure can basically be pinned down by examining two factors: the

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<sup>6</sup> In some Latin American countries, Chile, for example, barrio refers to a formally settled town or community.

breadth of its territorial presence and the extent to which it exerts controls over the population, including the “autonomous functionaries of estates” (Weber, 2009, 83). Arguably, claiming control requires a degree of societal penetration. Still, to avoid the pitfall of overstating state autonomy, it is useful to examine other formulations.

Stepan defined the state as the “continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive systems that attempt not only to structure relations *between* civil society and public authority in a polity but also to structure many crucial relationships within civil society” (Stepan, 1978, xii). He usefully adds: a state is a “mechanism for domination and control and so research into state effectiveness will be compelling when it examines how the issues of domination and control are *steered and negotiated within different state institutions and arenas of state-society interaction*” (Ibid, xiii, my emphasis). Two important contributions to subsequent literature on the state can be drawn from Stepan’s formulation. First, this conceptualization implies a distinctive approach to the meta-level puzzle of institutional reproduction (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). By defining the state as a set of relations, Stepan made a contribution to a research agenda on state building or formation. In other words, attempts to define the state as a static organization ultimately miss the point that states stabilize and change as they exercise power—for example, while formulating rules and then enforcing them.<sup>7</sup> Second, Stepan’s crucial insight that domination and control are properties likely to fluctuate from arena to arena anticipated the contemporary debate about state capacity and varying levels of capacity by arena.

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<sup>7</sup> Stepan’s conceptualization of the state as a set of relations calls into question the usefulness of a hard and fast distinction—posited recently by Fukuyama (2013)—between the state as an organization and governance as the process surrounding organizational operations.

## 1.1 *State Capacity and Stateness*

Miguel Centeno and Augustin Ferraro's recent volume on state and nation making in Latin America and Spain begins with a plain but astute observation. The "notion of state capacity," they observe, "is self-evident and deceptively simple" (Centeno and Ferraro, 2013, 10). In other words, capacity is evidently a useful thing. But, as Rothstein points out in his critique of analyses that conflate high quality governance with good governance (Rothstein, 2011), what is capacity useful for and in what grander sense? To avoid conflating empirical outcomes with normative approval of them it is useful to take a step back and consider measurement concerns. When do individual capabilities amount to a composite form of capacity? To what extent do procedural measures of governance provide purchase on quality (Fukuyama, 2013)? How much is just enough state, and how much is too much state? Or is it a question of lean and nimble versus scope and strength?

First, though, there is the separate issue of terminology: finding the term best suited for describing the effectiveness of the state. Currently, state capacity is the prevailing term for breaking down the question of effectiveness into a tractable research inquiry. There is, though, a problem with using the notion of capacity as an overarching framework. Very simply, it is hard to draw the line between discrete arenas of medium or high capacity and overall capacity.

Of assistance here is recent research calling attention to the usefulness of a "dual track" sub-national approach (Taylor, et al., 2013). The dual track approach refers to embedding analysis of discrete agencies or arenas within the broader structure of the polity itself. As such, it opens the possibility for mapping the problem by agency or arena—that is, for the existence of "islands of excellence" or 'pockets of efficiency'" that "coexist alongside informal, patrimonial, and clientelistic practices in less regarded bureaucratic agencies" (Taylor et al., 2013, 7).

Historical trends in Venezuela's petro-state illustrate the value of such a dual track approach. The petro-state excelled in two linked arenas where it chose to develop specialization—capturing ground rents and extracting concessions from international oil companies through negotiating royalty taxes (Tugwell, 1975). Moreover, the institutions managing these arenas boasted Venezuela's best and the brightest minds and featured merit-based criteria shaped hiring practices. Yet, the Venezuelan state's demonstrable capacity at negotiating generous royalty and taxation agreements came at a cost.

According to Karl, this ability neither catalyzed coherent state building nor generated capacity in the 'whole is greater than the sum of its parts' sense. The Venezuelan state proved "to be highly effective in implementing objectives" but these decisions were "determined through a highly ineffective decision-making process" that proved "irrational and even destructive to its own norms or institutions" (Karl, 1997, 45). If the quality of decision-making and the challenge of sustaining development gains are taken into consideration, then state capacity is not reducible to the jurisdiction of the state or the satisfaction of official goals (Karl, 1997, 45). Instead, state capacity needs to be judged "in a larger sense as the sum total of a state's material ability to control, extract, and allocate resources as well as its symbolic or political ability to create, implement, and enforce collective decisions" (Ibid, 45). Arguably, the indicators of these material and symbolic dimensions all deserve places on a research agenda on capacity. At the same time, this understanding interprets capacity as an organic composite. In fact, as Karl defines it, state capacity is an "aggregate, if imprecise, measure" (Ibid). By the same token, this conception sets a rather high bar for identifying genuine capacity.

The pitfall is that this formulation biases us to code those state systems that do not to meet this standard as completely lacking capacity. In the way that Lindblom argued the frameworks of

rationality and institutional design created irrational expectations for administrative effectiveness (Lindblom, 1959), I suggest that an unduly high standard for counting state capacity limits exploration of the complex arrangements through which capabilities coexist with imperfect functionality and weaknesses coexist with muddling through mediocrity. In other words, the spirit of the state capacity literature, which arose from a call to unpack the notions of strong and weak states, needs revitalization. Unpacking the forms and degrees of capacity is a productive point of departure.

Marking a shift away from Karl's compound conception of capacity, and charting a path for research that considers the state's impact in society, I use the lens of stateness to gain purchase on capacity by arenas.<sup>8</sup> This is partially an exercise in recovery. From Nettl's classic article (Nettl, 1968) to contemporary (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Tilly, 2007) and very recent (Anderson, et al., 2014) attempts to re-conceive democracy as crucially linked to different measures of the state, the term stateness has endured as a way to capture very basic properties and measures of the state's hard presence and soft influence. For analytic leverage purposes, stateness is useful because it carries few connotations. Defining the state is a question of degree—the extent of state.

## *1.2 Operationalizing Stateness*

Studying stateness requires reorienting existing frameworks for examining breadth and depth. To take a prominent example, the extent of stateness by breadth and depth is at the heart of a preliminary inquiry by O'Donnell into the relationships between states and democratization (O'Donnell, 1993). For South and Central America, O'Donnell pointed to the common problem

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of a dual track approach is broad enough to evaluate the state's capacity in relational arenas but it bears underlining Taylor's research framework is specifically designed for examining bureaucratic agencies, that is, for 'excellence' within the state.



of either “very little or nil” state territorial presence or examples of institution’s functional ineffectiveness (O’Donnell, 1993, 1359). In this respect, considerations of stateness can start with examining whether the “orders issued by state organizations have similar effectiveness throughout the national territory and across the existing social stratification” (Ibid, 1358). Put differently, is there a state presence in this place and time, and to what degree and depth?

O’Donnell’s rough mapping of ‘stateness’ examines the extent of state presence and the quality of state protection, as seen through bureaucracies’ regulative and policy efforts (O’Donnell, 1993). For presence, the state needs only to be re-presented through officials’ functional activities. For protection, O’Donnell emphasizes the breadth of the rule of law. Another important measure of protection is economic security, broken down in terms of access to goods and services (Ibid, 1360).

To illustrate the point that presence and protection vary over territory, O’Donnell developed a rough color code of brown, green and blue state spaces. Spaces characterized by virtual statelessness in terms of presence and, therefore, low quality state protection, are “brown;” zones with “high degree of territorial penetration and significantly lower presence in functional/class terms” are green; and those with high state presence and extensive protection across societal cleavages are blue (O’Donnell, 1993, 1359).

To move from a mapping of stateness exercise to outlining a sequential process for how the breadth and depth of stateness may expand, we need to take a step back. For example, how do governments cultivate or construct the ability to provide protection when there are manifest weaknesses in this arena? To capture these aspects of stateness, the framework of state infrastructural power proves quite useful.

### *1.3 Infrastructural Power to Infrastructural Capacity*

Mann (1986) classifies ‘governing over’ society as falling under a state’s despotic power and the process of state institutions ‘governing through’ society as falling under a state’s infrastructural power. For Mann, a high quality state is characterized by a government that can wield effective sovereignty (despotic power) and steer state-society negotiations over national citizenship and social protection in a legitimate fashion (infrastructural power). As implied by the title of Slater’s recent investigation into these matters in Southeast Asia—Democratizing Leviathan (Slater, 2011)—the perennial problem is charting a path to this outcome.

First, I stress the semantic shift from infrastructural power to infrastructural capacity. The advantage of capacity over power boils down to a simple but important measurement tradeoff: arguably, the former is easier to trace in degrees. Put differently, capacity is a continuous variable; there are forms of capacity that exist in degrees. Meanwhile, power is better construed as a dichotomous variable; there are kinds of power, but all whole.

Second, while I accept that individual demonstrations of competences and or abilities do not amount to system-wide capacity, I also propose the intrinsic value of probing specific arenas to trace whether these magnitudes of capacity exist. Since infrastructural capacity is relational by definition, a further pertinent step is to focus less on territorial breadth and unpack institutional depth more in terms of sub-system sectors or policy thematic arenas. Thus, important elements of infrastructural capacity can be tracked in sub-national institutional arenas over space and time.

### 1.3.1 *Infrastructural Capacity Unpacked*

This gives us four arenas of institutional activities—revenue raising, administrative coherence, policy effectiveness, and legitimacy. Within these arenas, moreover, I identify domains of activities. This helps further unpack capacity down to core abilities.

- First, what are the state’s abilities at coordinating society through raising revenue, and is one form of revenue raising dominant—the process of capturing rents or the more socially complex process of extracting taxes?
- Second, under the broad umbrella of administrative coherence, what are the public sector’s cognitive competences?
- Third, under policy effectiveness, to what extent do agencies implement policy, and which programs are implemented with broadly distributed social development effects?
- Fourth, under legitimacy, to what extent do officials command symbolic authority in the field?

#### Figure 3.0. Forms of Infrastructural Capacity in Four Institutional Arenas

- Taxation: A) Capturing Revenue (Amount) and B) Breadth of Revenue Base (Depth of Extractive Capacity)
- Administrative Coherence: A) Acquiring Technical Data (Ability to Aggregate) and B) Discerning Social Rationalities (Legibility)
- Policy Effectiveness: A) Quality of policies for inclusive development, B) Reach of policies across sub-national-levels, and C) Penetration of policies among social groups
- Legitimacy: A) Generating Recognition and B) Becoming Accepted

Thus, within these four arenas—revenue raising, administrative coherence, policy effectiveness, and legitimacy—we can identify trends and patterns. After identifying these, we can

scale back up, aggregating patterns to identify different magnitudes of capacity. To reiterate, aggregated trends may amount to evidence of stateness, without indicating overall infrastructural capacity. For example, arena-wide trends indicate enclaves of stateness that vary in their attributes—hidden pockets, unlinked islands, swaths that straddle arenas, and densely layered areas of state presence that provide foundation.

### *1.3.A. Revenue Raising in a Petro-State: The Rent Capturing Racket*

Discussion of the first arena, raising state revenue, can be postponed to the forthcoming case description where the topic is addressed more thoroughly. Venezuelan governments became famous for their weak capacity in terms of taxing private citizens and their propensity to develop revenue through rents of two modal types—royalty and windfall taxes for foreign oil majors and the licensing of economic activities. Thus in Venezuela the high level reliance on rent capturing and weak ability to extract revenue from private citizens reveals a very low level of infrastructural capacity in this key arena.

### *1.3.B. Administration Coherence: Developing Cognitive Competence*

The second arena, administrative coherence, draws attention to what development literature generally describe as procedural measures of bureaucratic quality (Fukuyama, 2013). Limiting assessment of administrative coherence to measures of the civil service's education and professionalism can result in an excessively narrow lens of analysis. For example, it seems obvious but it bears repeating that developing administrative coherence can require officials to acquire information before they summon and standardize it. The building block of acquiring information should not be taken for granted. The controversial question is whether such information can be

acquired through a framework of impersonal state-society relations, the gold standard of Weberian Bureaucracy. Depending on the path of political development, impersonal relations may not be practical or even the most useful. For example, public engagement can be crucial to obtaining context specific knowledge about the population and developing administrative coherence (Tendler, 1997).

Lee and Zhang usefully frame the problem of state presence in terms of expanded degrees of stateness. They ask: “what is the density of state – society interaction – the degree to which contact with state agents, institutions and rules influences the decision-making of citizens?” (Lee and Zhang, 2013, 1-2). This goes to the heart of the matter. States should not only be physically present through contact between officers and citizens. In a strong state, official programs should come to shape the attitudes and practices of the subject population. The theme of presence is also paramount in Evans’s notion of “Embedded Autonomy” (Evans, 1995). By rethinking the rule that an effective bureaucracy is necessarily “insulated,” Evans created analytic space for illustrating how combinations of “corporate coherence” with societal “connectedness” possessed creative potential (Evans, 1995, 12).

This discussion of how establishing state presence involves significant state-society interactions points to a frequently forgotten challenge. Before state offices shape populations they need information about them. Consequently, administrative coherence can boil down to a deceptively simple process of gathering facts. Roughly, fact gathering involves probing into technical and social fact domains. For technical fact gathering, the questions might be: has the state acquired information for planning, processed it, and assimilated it through official procedures and elaborated it through a state plan? What are the state’s cognitive abilities to “amass information and establish standards” (Centeno and Ferraro, 2013, 12)? What is the performance level of the

census bureau and what about the quality of its reports for accurately reporting on population trends (Lee and Zhang, 2013)? Can officials aggregate societal needs?

Social fact gathering presupposes a highly subjective process. The state is drawing from multiple sources — attitudes, practices, and habits—to produce social data rather than tallying the numbers recorded from household surveys. Ultimately, these data refer to social rationalities. How do the state’s cognitive capabilities vary by territory or in relating to marginalized classes, races or ethnicities, and genders whose social reality may not synchronize with dominant groups? This is Scott’s classic puzzle: to what extent can the state render societal behavior “legible” as coded patterns (Scott, 1985)?

This ground level registering and surveying is governing in one of its purest forms. The state may seek to develop a comprehensive understanding of population demographics and social habits for a variety of reasons. In any case, mechanisms for establishing state presence can help institutions develop more complementary associations.

The forming of complementarity is a possible outcome state presence. For example, state presence is an elemental building block of establishing communication distinct from cultivating channels that shape societal preferences. Presence is a condition of possibility for complementary state-society interactions. The broader lesson is that administrative competence can be better measured if we expand the category of policy planning inputs. By the same token, policy planning inputs need to be thought of as variables rather than freely available resources (Abers and Keck, 2013). We risk mischaracterizing the strengths and weaknesses of a policy apparatus if we assume policy makers operate with solid technical and social information about the problems they are tasked to address.

### *1.3.3 Policy Effectiveness: Development Across Divides*

The third form of infrastructural capacity, development effectiveness, involves policy outputs. Centeno and Ferraro propose three measures for gauging the effectiveness of policy inputs—the quality of policies in terms of 1) whether they effectively defend or promote the provision of “public order, public services, economic prosperity or inclusion” (Ibid, 11); the extent to which 2) policy reaches across administrative layers; and the extent to which 3) policy provides for and regulates the affairs of populations situated differentially by cleavages of class, gender, ethnicity or race (Ibid, 11-12).

For purposes here, these three measures can be thought of as domains within the arena of development effectiveness. That is, policy outputs may vary on different scales. For example, the state’s development initiatives may prove ineffective at promoting public order on a national level. But priorities may actually lie elsewhere. Development may exhibit effectiveness in reaching corners of society that grew marginalized from state programs after years of political neglect. A domain of buzzing interaction may therefore be revealed as an enclave of stateness.

While a great deal of scholarship highlights the input and output dimensions of policy administration, recent research casts light on difficulties governments face to powering through society. Abers and Keck described this powering through process as the missing “throughput” link (Abers and Keck, 2006; 2013). Similarly, Ostrom and others identified ‘coproduction’ as a practical form of conjoined governmental and non-governmental activity (Ostrom, 1996). These important contributions help us better understand the practical effects of governments and multilateral development organizations mandating participatory development programs. They also call attention to issues that hamper the state’s ability to carrying out policy goals at the state-society interface. Invariably, questions of legitimacy stand at the center.

### 1.3.4 *Legitimacy and Infrastructural Capacity*

The fourth arena, legitimacy, speaks to the process of a state becoming accepted as a legitimate actor. In an historical sense, this process is marked by a kind of transfer of social authority into public authority (Huntington, 1968).<sup>9</sup> Through high rituals and low practices – state protocol and everyday policing – the state structure embodies this public authority (Mitchell, 1990). Likewise, by standardizing operating procedures authority relations become articulated as code (March and Olsen, 1984). This transfer of social authority into public authority does not mean the state becomes dis-embedded from society (Evans, 1995). Rather, routinizing public authority refers to monopoly control over “judgment of truth claims” (Centeno and Ferraro, 2013, 12).

Roughly, legitimacy has two core properties—recognition and acceptance. First, to what extent is the state recognized as a source of authority? How do institutions gain credibility and standing? Second, in what ways do institutions show they have influence as entities licensed to exercise authority over populations? Does an institution ever command the power of symbolizing truth through its exercises in a policy arena?

### 1.4 *Beyond ‘Autonomous’ Infrastructural Capacity*

The central value of the state infrastructural capacity literature is that it helps to broaden the lens beyond *de jure* bases of state power to examine ways state power is wielded in practice through society. Alone, this expansion of the research agenda carries important implications. For

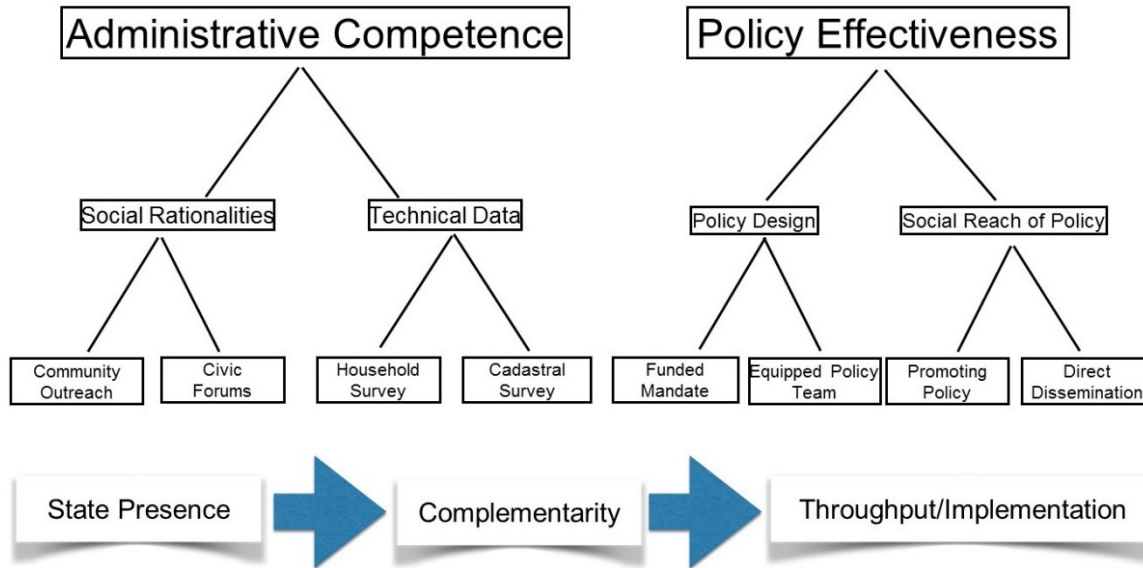
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<sup>9</sup> The emergence of legitimacy implies a broad and fairly deep running process of public encroachment on societal forms of self-governance. This encroachment involves a transition marked by contestation at multiple junctures. It does not inexorably yield state domination. Instead, it involves negotiations over penetration and incorporation—state institutions or those standing for state institutions penetrating society as rulers incorporate societal elements into a national framework for fulfilling an expanded scope of ruling concerns. Centeno and Ferraro describe this transition as unfolding through the state’s “diffusion of law and administration in areas previously ungoverned by these systems” (Centeno and Ferraro, 2013, 11). Theoretically, all states have an interest in diffusing these laws to enhance its influence to the point its actions are seen as symbolizing truth. This process of diffusion may imply penetration to differing degrees. For example, the U.S. state arguably enjoys broad acceptance. But, the U.S. state competes with a strong liberal tradition (Hartz, 1955) and wields weak influence when compared with advanced industrial states.

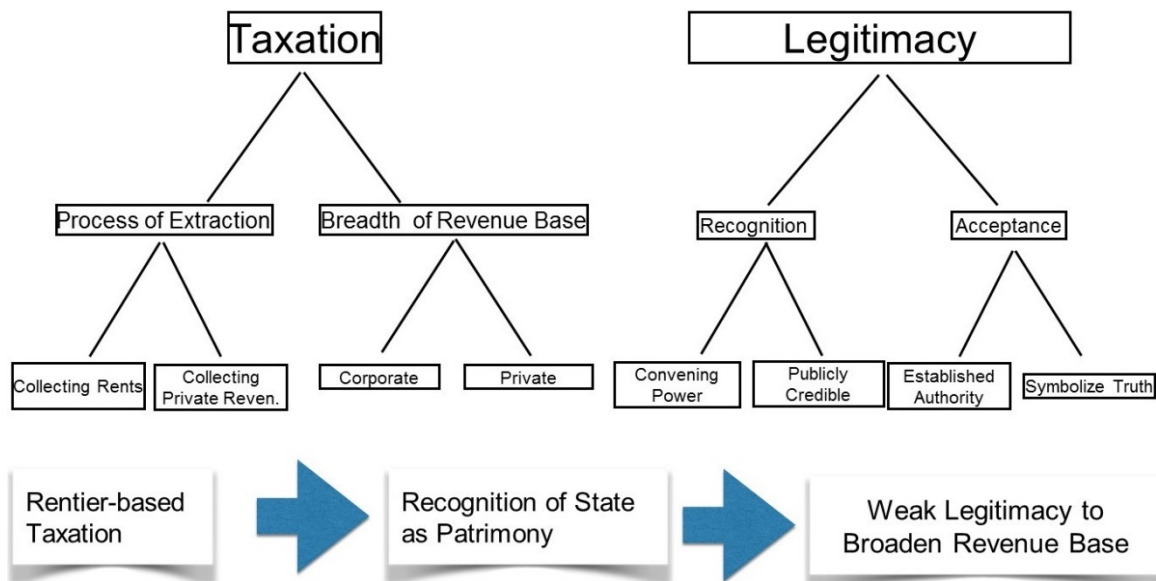


example, it helps researchers maintain a healthy skepticism about whether a big state is a strong one. However, one of the critical contributions of the state infrastructural literature has yet to be fully elaborated. The basic idea of infrastructural power is that states are not fully autonomous. The generation of infrastructural capacity depends on processes of contestation that take place on societal grounds, and through structured interactions between governments and populations. But such interactions are likely to be intermediated by organizations that carry the burden of steering collective action while ordinary members of the population make their livings. In other words, political parties, or political movements more broadly, are key parts of any discussion about infrastructural processes. These organizations attempt to penetrate both state and society to gain political power and govern more effectively. In short, infrastructural capacity refers to a multilateral dynamic. Because multiple organizational interests are likely to be at play in the context of spaces where infrastructural capacity is at stake, the role of parties is central to the puzzle of state infrastructure capacity, as my illustration of the Venezuelan case under Punto Fijo demonstrates.

**Figure 4.0 Unpacking State Infrastructural Capacity—Example A:**  
 Administrative Competence and Policy Effectiveness  
 1) Arenas of Activities, 2) Domains of Practice, 3) Manifest Abilities



**Figure 5.0 Unpacking State Infrastructural Capacity—Example B:**  
 Taxation and Legitimacy  
 1) Arenas of Activities, 2) Domains of Practice, 3) Manifest Abilities



## II. Emergence and Degeneration: Party-Mediated Stateness in the Barrios

“In Venezuela,” said former President Jamie Lusinchi (1983-1988), “only the stupid pay taxes” (Lusinchi, 1994, quoted in Karl, 1997, 172). This strikingly frank remark is also notable for its accuracy. Venezuelans openly discuss the discretion they exercise in paying property or income taxes. Similarly, many boast they have the choices to pay only those governments worthy of a portion of their private earnings and not to pay elected administrations “*que no sirven*” (that are worthless). It may be counterproductive to view discretionary tax payment as a harmless indulgence. But, in any case, Venezuela’s pattern of state formation is responsible for the pervasiveness of this peccadillo. As Karl claimed, Venezuela is the paradigmatic “petro-state” (Karl, 1997).<sup>10</sup>

### *2.1 The Venezuelan Petro-State: Rent Capturing, Distribution, and Myths*

Petro-states represent a sub-class of oil exporting countries. Petro-states are in a situation of capital deficiency in terms of capital resources vis-à-vis population size and density (Karl, 1997, 17).<sup>11</sup> This creates a situation in which governance is “characterized by fiscal reliance on petrodollars” (Ibid). In turn dependency “encourages the political distribution of rents,” patterns that ultimately expand the state’s jurisdiction but weakens institutional authority as “other extractive capabilities wither” (Karl, 1997, 16).

In 1912 the foundation for the petro-state emerged from two mutually reinforcing legal decisions that suited the interests of foreign major oil companies. Both the country’s attorney

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<sup>10</sup> Petro-state formation represents a crucial chapter in Venezuela’s long and complex history with oil (Lieuwen, 1955; Perez Alfonzo, 1971; Tugwell, 1975; Ewell, 1984; Coronil, 1997; Tinker Salas, 2009). For institutionalists who tend to evaluate the quality of governance and democracy in relation to procedural measurements, petro-state formation is the most germane chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Sparsely populated Saudia Arabia and Kuwait are, for instance, examples of capital surplus oil exporters.

general and the Supreme Court deemed private landowners' mining rights unconstitutional. The dictator Juan Vicente Gómez, acting on behalf of the nation, gained the exclusive authority to directly contract with foreign oil companies and charge fees for concessions and collect royalties (Karl, 1997, 79).

Thus, the formation of the petro-state began under a predatory regime. But the characteristically structural element of the petro-state is that this formation grew more entrenched after transitions to democracy. First in 1946, and then again in 1959, elected governments sealed into place petrolization—"a type of oil-based social contract among organized interests" (Karl, 1997, 57-58). Since 1959, Venezuelan leaders of all political stripes framed the assertion of state control over the oil industry as akin to the fulfillment of national sovereignty. The domestic politics byproduct of petrolization has a lasting effect. It severed the link between domestic taxation and state building (Karl, 1997, 61). Instead of a grand bargain of government extracting revenues from subjects to pay for their protection, governments bought protection through international rent extraction.

From 1977-1979 70.30 percent of Venezuela's total tax revenue came from corporate taxation—almost all of it from foreign oil companies (Karl, 1997, 171). Meanwhile, South American neighbors collected on average 14.75 percent of their taxes from corporate taxation. Statistics on personal taxation are more striking. Venezuela collected 4 percent from private individuals. Venezuela's western neighbor Colombia—not a strong state by any measure—collected 11 percent of tax income from the same source (Karl, 1997, 89).

The Venezuelan state's historic strengths at capturing rents and weakness at extracting private taxes speaks to the wide gap between considerably large state size and significantly diminished institutional authority (Karl, 1997, 67). This set forth an institutional framework for

the state to exercise widespread jurisdiction over the economy. For example, the Venezuelan economy exhibited the second largest public sector in Latin America, second to Socialist Cuba (Karl, 1997, 90). A state with fairly extensive territorial presence could raise revenue by capturing rents but it did not have revenue extracting powers.

The relationship between the petro-state formation and the issue of state legitimacy points to an interesting puzzle. Evaluated against understandings of the modern state as implying some kind of compact between state and society over government taxation for social protection (Tilly, 1985), the petro-state lacked legitimacy. No such compact existed and manifest opposition to one suggested major obstacles to advancing on that front.

However, the petro-state most definitely became institutionalized. It fostered a form of semiotic legitimacy memorably described in Coronil's Magical State (Coronil, 1997). The state's roles distributing rents and symbolizing national sovereignty helped transform unelected and elected rulers "into magicians who embodied the myth of progress and give it specific form" (Coronil, 1997, 370). While the structural relationship of collective belief in the Venezuelan state's 'magical' abilities withstood regime changes, under Punto Fijo democracy parties reaped the benefits and then faced the challenges of reproducing this relationship through governance.

## *2.2. Setting a Foundation: Party-Mediated State-Society Relations*

On January 23 1959 the military dictatorship of General Pérez Jiménez (1948-1958) collapsed. Shortly thereafter, political elites signed pacts calling for power sharing and minimalist policy-making. These agreements, privately negotiated at the Punto Fijo residence of Rafael Caldera, enjoyed the support of a wide array of organized groups, except the Communist Party (PCV) and other Left-wing organizations. Thus, so-called Punto Fijo democracy began with the

notable exclusion of the PCV, which had collaborated with moderate sectors to topple Pérez Jiménez.

Two large party organizations, *Acción Democrática* (AD), the self-described “party of the people” which boasted strong ties to labor and peasant sectors, and COPEI, the social Christian party, oversaw pact implementation. They quickly became the system’s guardians. The first elections were held in 1959.

AD flexed its muscle among the masses, with leaders Romulo Betancourt and Raul Leoni easily winning the 1959 and 1963 Presidential elections, respectively. In 1961, Venezuela passed a new Constitution, which granted continuity to the principles of power centralization in the executive and state interventionism in the economy (Karl, 1997, 105).<sup>12</sup> The consensus of ‘sowing the oil,’ intellectual Arturo Uslar Pietri’s slogan for harnessing oil for industrialization, gained quasi-official expression in the Constitution.

Punto Fijo elites, a class that also included politicians outside of AD and COPEI, fully understood their democracy inherited a state uniquely equipped for capturing petroleum rents. These elites also faced pressures from different sectors. On the one hand, conservative elements in the military and business remained unconvinced about the compatibility between democracy and their self-interests. In a word, money made them reconsider. The interim government effectively bought these sectors off through agreements to pay debts incurred by the military government and to pay “\$1.4 billion to bankers and industrialists to ensure their support for the new regime” (Karl, 1997, 98). On the other hand, there were masses of new urban residents thirsty for employment, education, and decent living standards. The Emergency Plan public works program adopted by the 1958-1959 caretaker government helped accommodate these demands,

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<sup>12</sup> Importantly, the Communist Party signed the 1961 Constitution despite their prior exclusion from the pacts.

which peaked after popular uprisings helped topple Perez Jimenez (Ibid). The winding down of the Emergency Plan dovetailed with signs of risk-averse policy making.

Pacts on a minimalist policy agenda and power sharing had the express purpose of guaranteeing inter-elite unity (Karl, 1997, 98).<sup>13</sup> They would shape Punto Fijo in an enduring manner. For example, an early 1960s land reform promoted by AD employed compensatory mechanisms to distribute parcels of land to approximately 160,000 household heads and left large land holdings intact (Lombardi, 1982, 235-236). When enthusiasm for the land reform petered out, this symbolized the ebbing of AD's radicalism and the entrenchment of aversion—on the part of both parties' leadership—to redistributive policy measures.

Lessons derived from the 1946-1948 *trienio* and the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship help account for the rise of '*concertación*.' During the *trienio*, when AD first came to power via a coup and then won election in 1947, the Gallegos government enjoyed very high popular approval (Molina, 2004, 155-156). Benefitting from an oil-boom fueled budget increase of "240 percent between 1945 and 1948" AD's government oversaw wage increases, implemented basic goods subsidies, and generally used the state to build a support structure (Coronil, 1997, 135). With AD leaders pulling the strings, the number of urban and rural trade unions increased dramatically (Powell, 1971, 79). However, the noted submissiveness of these unions (Bergquist, 1986) raised the question of whether AD preferred unionization resulting in mobilization or in bureaucratization (Coronil, 1997, 141-145).

AD was no doubt popular. But, when oil prices fell, the party's policies threatened entrenched interests in the Church, and the Gallegos government became synonymous with "sectarian rule" (Coronil, 1997, 139), AD's electoral popularity declined. The military intervention

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<sup>13</sup> A more thorough discussion of the pacts is available in Karl, 1987.

that ended the *trienio* prompted the exiling of AD's leadership.<sup>14</sup> Exile humbled AD leaders, particularly Betancourt. From New York, where he continued to cultivate a relationship with Nelson Rockefeller, Betancourt moderated his platform. Post-Pérez Jimenez, the conciliatory posture of AD indicated Betancourt's renunciation of policy measures explicitly aimed at wealth redistribution.

Still, Venezuela had oil, it was growing at a solid rate, and ideologically it was different from, for example, Colombia or Peru, countries where a center-right consensus anchored policy agendas on conservative ground (Adelman 2006). For instance, the "minimum government" consensus implied that regardless of whether AD or COPEI held power, governments would pledge a healthy amount of the budget to social expenditures (Myers, 2004). COPEI moved to the center and the right-wing became a space for outsiders.

After the two AD governments completed their elected terms concern grew about incumbent power. If 'the party of the people' won a third term, would AD's hegemonic pretensions resurface through renewed 'sectarian rule? Incumbent advantage raised bigger questions since it spoke directly to the power that could be wielded by whomever controlled the state economic power. Under the petro-state, Coronil argued, "class struggle centered on the state," which meant "the right to rule and the right to make money became intimately intertwined," not exchanged, as Poulantzas's notion of bonapartist democracy emphasized (Coronil, 1997, 222-224). Thus, what Coronil terms 'rentier Bonapartism' held out the prospect of avoiding class conflict through a political compromise rooted in shared "appropriation and distribution of ground rent" (Ibid, 224).

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<sup>14</sup> Ellner (1980) and Coronil (1997) both contend that AD's foregoing of genuine mobilization—fomenting strikes and encouraging contentious actions toward economic elites—in favor of promoting 'social peace' undermined the party's capacity to summon popular support. Without a vibrant base, they argue, AD could not defend itself from the coup (Ellner, 1980, 141; Coronil, 1997, 147).



Subsequent events alleviated concerns the pact on power sharing would not hold together. Rafael Caldera, head of Social Christian party COPEI, won a tight 1968 election. Then, AD and COPEI banded together to defeat what looked to be a stubborn challenge from a Left-wing guerrilla insurgency inspired by the Cuban revolution. According to Levine, the threat of the insurgencies increased cohesion between the parties and catalyzed greater bipartisan cooperation (Levine, 1978, 98). But it was not just the existence of a common enemy that generated enthusiasm. After Caldera defeated the guerrilla movements, Venezuela became one of the richest countries per capita in South America, and so it seemed Punto Fijo was moving along a steady track (Ibid).<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, AD and COPEI developed deep organizational roots in society. The AD-linked *Centro de Trabajadores Venezolanos* (Confederation of Venezuela Workers, CTV) became emblematic of how widely that party's organizational appendages reached and how much weight the preferences of party elites had vis-a-vis union activists (Ellner, 1980). Examining the frequency with which party decisions determined how AD delegates to the CTV Executive Committee voted in the latter's hearings, Coppedge found no evidence of CTV autonomy vis-a-vis AD and determined the latter had veto power over the former (Coppedge, 1994, 31-32). Additionally, a proto-corporatist formula of parties chartering civil society commenced, with associations often serving as surrogate partisan voices in interest group politics (Levine, 1978; McCoy, 1985).

The emergent pattern of party mediated state-society relations might have exhibited more tensions if not for three factors. First, relative to the recent past decade of repressive dictatorship, party rule provided many more liberties. Second, as Levine (1978) and Coronil (1997) point out in different veins, mobilization was born partisan. Levine argues that civil society groups were born partisan, a point reinforced by Salamanca's argument that civil society, when it was first

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<sup>15</sup> The fight against the guerrillas included a significant number of human rights abuses by authorities and the government of Raul Leoní (1965-1969), which suspended Constitutional guarantees in 1967.

introduced into public discourse, in fact referred to a non-militaristic order (Salamanca, 2004). Coronil argues that parties created the new “social map” (Coronil, 1997, 145) in which associations exhibited neither functional independence nor ideological autonomy. Third, extensive social spending lubricated party machineries and low-level brokers channeled goods down to the bases.

Government social expenditures proceeded through two mechanisms: a) social programs, as defined by expenditures for health, education, water and sanitation, housing and recreations, and labor relations, and b) patronage, personnel hiring based primarily on political criteria (Karl, 1997, 104). The transition from dictatorship to Punto Fijo democracy saw expenditures increase. Social policy expenditures grew from 11.4 percent to 28.1 percent during the first fifteen years of Punto Fijo, 1958-1973. Patronage grew, too, with personnel expenditures increasing from 22.7 percent of total central-government payments in 1958-1959 to 33.7 percent in 1961 after which they stabilized (Kornblith and Maíngon, 1985, 211).<sup>16</sup>

The prominence of patronage spoke to a kind of implicit third pact. The two dominant parties effectively partitioned the state through a “political allocation of state offices” that “placed strong limits on the range of debate” (Karl, 1997, 99). In the name of giving inter-elite unity a governmental expression, “regardless of who won the elections, each party was guaranteed some access to state jobs and contracts, a partitioning of the ministries, and a complicated spoils system that would ensure the political survival of all signatories” (Ibid). In short, with patronage a bipartisan affair, this practice became part and parcel of maintaining inter-elite unity.

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<sup>16</sup> Based on a comparison of national budgets during Pérez Jiménez and the first decade of Punto Fijo by Baloyra (1974), Coronil casts doubt on whether these increases constituted a qualitative shift in the total amount of spending or a reshuffling of the budget’s distribution (Coronil, 1997, 185).

Set in the broader sweep of comparative political development, patronage and hierarchical politics seemed entirely forgivable sins. Indeed, with alternation in power emerging as a key pattern, the guerrilla movements defeated, and evidence of a rising urban middle class, Punto Fijo seemed poised to facilitate democratic development (Levine, 1973). Or put differently, given how the country's extremely bloody civil wars in the nineteenth century delayed efforts at national unity, the lack of democratic heritage and Venezuela's distinctive position in a regional context mostly marked by authoritarian rule, Punto Fijo signified an intriguingly positive case for theories of democratization. Despite the conditions, it seemed, democracy was prevailing. Wrote one historian, system survival itself said something "remarkable" about Venezuela's prospects (Lombardi, 1982, 241). Thus, few questioned the pattern of parties heavily mediating state-society relations.<sup>17</sup> Broadly, the pattern resonated with Huntington's fashionable argument: praetorianism could be avoided if parties strengthened political order (Huntington, 1968).

### *2.3 Party-Permeated Stateness: Punto Fijo in the Barrios*

A common sense correlation between Punto Fijo governments and development outcomes made it hard to criticize party-mediated state-society relations. From 1960 to 1980, industrial output grew on average 7.3 percent, which increased manufacturing job opportunities (Naím, 1993, 23). Over roughly the same period, per capita gross domestic product steadily rose, at a rate average higher than that of Argentina—South America's 'middle class' country—and energy consumption and electrification plans expanded in scope and incorporated new populations into the public infrastructure (Lombardi, 1982, 231-233). Low levels of inflation meant real wage

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<sup>17</sup> Building on the critiques of Venezuelan political elites, such as those by Bonilla (1970) and Michelena (1971), Normal Gall's critical review essay of Punto Fijo democracy is a notable exception in this respect. See Gall, Norman, "Carnival in Caracas," New York Review of Books, November 15, 1973.  
<<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1973/nov/15/carnival-in-caracas/>>

growth (Kelly and Palma, 2004, 207-209). Meanwhile, a decline in poverty, particularly during the late 1970s when the oil boom allowed the AD government to practically wipe out extreme poverty, projected an image of classlessness (Buxton, 2003, 114-115).

These outcomes weakened the arguments of critics and reduced the impetus to develop independent state mechanisms for service delivery. They also served as a mask in a more profound way. Successful development outcomes disguised the true failings of party-mediated state-society relations.

In fact, party fulfillment of infrastructural functions was counter productive for building state institutional capacities. Venezuela exhibited a manifest disjuncture between low quality administrative inputs and high quality outputs. To illustrate this disjuncture, I offer a grounded description of party-permeated stateness in the barrios. This description highlights two points. State officials were present on the front lines but absent in the spaces where local forms of power were at play. For example, when this arrangement yielded state presence on the front lines, ensuing interaction did not necessarily entail a process of state fact finding. As a result, party-permeated stateness did not necessarily increase the public administration's cognitive abilities or social legibility. This inhibited the development of administrative competence.

### *2.3.1 Husbandry and Brokerage: The Party Men*

Capturing the specific aspects of party-permeated stateness require a detailed description of what sorts of activities party officials undertook. Thanks to parties' interest in mobilizing new constituents and their demonstrable organizational power, state-collected petroleum rents found distribution outlets through party linkages to society. The primacy of parties over state institutions had important consequences for state-society relations. With the parties directly mediating the flow

of goods, services, and information between state and society, they became gatekeepers in control of access to power.

What did this specifically entail at the *barrio* level? For firsthand management of community affairs parties employed brokers, local experts who had one foot in the party office and one in the community and who served as sources of firsthand knowledge for both the party and residents. Functionally, brokers worked as husbanders that conserved, or attempted to cultivate better, relations with community groups. Husbandry ran the gamut. It included clientelism and co-optation to containment through consultation (Ray, 1969; Powell, 1971). In this sense, husbandry entailed mediation—helping resolve disputes between a community and the local forms of the party-state.

The prevalence of husbander brokers at the *barrio* level was emblematic of the main upshot of party-permeated stateness: parties playing integral roles implementing policy in a manner that advanced their organizational goals but proved counterproductive for the development of state administrative competences. Party-permeated state-society relations implied an omnipresent state in a night watchman role.

This had its advantages and disadvantages. Notwithstanding their many questionable methods for penetrating the shantytowns, Venezuelan parties did make their presence known at the base levels of society (Ray, 1969). What is more, positive signs of party influence on the state could be found at the bottom. Arrangements for lifting the poor up through state channeled social development seemed to indicate Venezuelans were a “people on the move” (Peattie, 1968, 23). Oil-based prosperity induced massive urbanization and a significant rate of economic growth, around 4% a year during the 1950s and 1960s. Rapid urbanization produced large squatter towns

on the urban periphery. More importantly, these populations knew of Venezuela's oil wealth; more than franchise, they expected a better quality of life.

### 2.3.2 *La Laja, where AD made the population move*

Lisa Peattie's political ethnography of La Laja helps illustrate what party permeated stateness entailed and what costs and benefits it implied for this 'population on the move.' La Laja is a barrio of five hundred people on the outskirts of industrial hub Ciudad Guayana. It is situated at sea level along the banks of the Caroni and Orinoco rivers that meet in the city center. Geographically, La Laja has a very different topography than, for example, the hillside barrios that sit above the Caracas valley at heights of up to 2000 meters above the sea. Whether a barrio is situated at high altitude or sea level makes a big difference for the cost to the state of providing services, in particular the pumping of fresh water. Apart from the different logistical challenges facing hillside barrios in Caracas as opposed to sea-level barrios, La Laja faced similar challenges to those confronted by barrios in metropolitan areas. Hence, Peattie's analysis has some external validity for thinking about party-permeated stateness.

La Laja was first settled as a squatter town. But, La Laja's fairly close geographic proximity to Ciudad Guyana's downtown made it a moderately likely case for integration into the country's unfolding history of economic modernization.<sup>18</sup> State institutions, such as CORDIPLAN, the national planning agency, and the *Corporación Venezolano de Guayana* (CVG, Venezuelan Corporation for Guayana, a development agency), each established hubs in Guyana. They established a presence in La Laja but they arrived on the coattails of AD's local machinery.

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<sup>18</sup> Peattie describes La Laja as a "distinctly lower class barrio" (Peattie, 1968, 12). Distinctly lower class stands opposed to working class, which is the appropriate label for formed barrios in the San Felix town-center or those found in the downtown area of working class Catia in western Caracas. The class designation refers to the income level of barrio residents. Separate from income is the quality of services.

### 2.3.3. *AD in the Foreground: Gatekeeping and Husbandry*

In La Laja, as well as in other barrios, AD ruled, with its organization spread widely and penetrating deeply. Officials from AD often accompanied state officials in their community visits where they went house-to-house canvassing for support. They might well have led state officials on a tour that concluded with a coffee at AD's block-level *casa del partido*—literally a party house that served as an office.

Strikingly, Peattie describes CORDIPLAN's local community development office as forming the “beginnings of a local ward organization” for AD (Peattie 1968, 64). Peattie reverses the meaning of ‘patronage’ and describes AD as the recipient of ‘useful patronage’ in the form of “materials for community centers and water lines” (Ibid). In other words, the party marshaled the resources of state patronage and gained control of its distribution. This allowed AD to play a gatekeeping role.

Within the community, the barrio had a self-help group. The group's leadership board consisted of AD's La Laja activists. These *adeco* (member of AD) activists also worked under the cover of community leaders. Behind a thin veil they worked with the CORDIPLAN-AD structure to build the barrio's first water line. Peattie describes how an international development agency operating in La Laja grew outraged about this situation of party surrogacy. The international aid workers demanded the community self-help group hold elections to be eligible for funding. The *adeco* activists held a meeting to call for elections but the gathered residents re-nominated the existing leaders on the spot, obviating the need for elections. According to Peattie, the leaders prepared this tactic of self-sanctioned legitimacy aware it could offend the sensibilities of the international aid workers. Quite simply, that risk seemed worth taking. What made a difference was their commitment to AD.

AD's penetration of the community self-help groups had negative consequences for the self-help group's endurance. Tensions developed over the manifest favoritism leaders showed fellow *adecos*. Seeking to avert greater problems, the AD activist accused of displaying unfairness disbanded the group. The cycle repeated: community activism halted temporarily and leaders and gatekeepers resurfaced (Ibid, 67-69).

Peattie's account makes clear the extent to which personal methods of on-site consultation between AD and barrio residents served as the thread holding together the fabric of state-society relations in *La Laja*. Such interactions about the procedures for public-private collaboration constituted husbandry. AD's husbandry tactics provoked a reasonable amount of criticism. The close connections between AD officials and community activists fueled accusations of *amigismo* (favoritism to friends). *Amigismo* also operated inside the community, where community activists spread goods to their fellow party sympathizers. On other hand, Peattie implies that the community's new water line, the main fruit of AD's close connections with local activists, was an example where *amigismo* benefitted the whole community.

Notwithstanding AD's ability to dominate through the community, party and state institutions remained open to the idea of two-way communication. Prominent here was the holding of consultation meetings. These consultations provided spaces for residents to voice their preferences about the activities on which they wished to have a say.

For example, in the process of service delivery, the labor for completing *La Laja*'s micro-public works projects tended to come directly from the community. Peattie observed that laborers were friendly with the AD activists but that they had their own political views and participated on their own initiative. Their actions may not have run counter to the interests of AD. But their labors



also in some way gave meaning to the phrase “the community learning to solve its own problems by its own efforts” (Peattie, 1968, 66).

The practice of the community providing the labor illustrated the degree of active participation in service delivery through partially self-fashioned formulas. The community workforce represented a continuation of the barrio’s history of self-provision. AD’s respect for this tendency indicated one way to conserve relations. In this respect, the party’s approach helps illustrate a bigger problem. When interacting with populations that faced structural disadvantages, state or peak institutions faced the challenge of maintaining credibility as forces for change that did not trample on conventions. Small as they may seem, gestures giving some meaning to the phrase “the community learning to solve its own problems by its own efforts” (Peattie, 1968, 66) improved the tenor of relations between the powerful and the relatively powerless.

#### *2.3.4 The Night Watchman: The State in the Background*

State-society relations in La Laja did feature channels of non-party mediated state-society interaction. Some state institutions operated directly. Peattie observed adult education classes sponsored by the Ministry of Education and surveys of sanitation services by the Ministry of Health. Nevertheless, the CORDIPLAN-AD alliance served as the crucial link for residents to petition the state for electrification and the CVG for building materials (Ibid, 65-66).

Broadly, Peattie’s intensive study of La Laja resonates with the patterns in state-society relations Ray identified in his study of the politics of Caracas barrios (Ray, 1969).<sup>19</sup> In La Laja, just as in other barrios, the state’s presence was highly visible. But the state’s effectiveness at probing into society hinged on the organizational infrastructure provided by either AD or COPEI.

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<sup>19</sup> For an account of the state-party complex in Venezuela’s rural theater, see Powell, 1971.

The parties provided the first hand mediation that smoothed the delivery of services or goods in an environment where the residents had settled the neighborhood without state planners. Since the parties served as the linchpin to state policies effectively reaching society, they effectively steered policy delivery. Meanwhile, the present state stood by as the night watchman. State institutions depended on the extensiveness of party officials' ties to barrios for its access. They therefore saw little reason to oppose the parties' appropriation of these responsibilities.

### *2.3.5 Disjuncture Between Administrative Inputs and Policy Outputs*

The notion of the party in the foreground as gatekeeper and husband and the state in the background as nightwatchman is captured in Karl's description of the chain of demand making between top and bottom. The description provides a strong indication of why this arrangement inhibited administrative competence.

Local leaders made local needs known to national party heads, who then passed requests to top party leaders, the relevant minister, or the president. The response was filtered through the ministry back to the local agency. Individuals or organizations had virtually no hope of being heard unless they utilized party networks and followed party guidelines. The procedure encouraged favor seekers to find some way to go to the top of the decision-making apparatus because lower-level bureaucrats would often refuse to take any action without the approval of the president or a minister (Karl, 1997, 107).

Coupling this synthesis of highly top-down, party-mediated decision-making with the insights of the La Laja example, we can draw some implications about party-permeated stateness for the nature of infrastructural capacity. Did it make a difference whether political or public institutions serve as infrastructural power's source?

The answer suggested here is that political institutions—that is, parties—can marshal crucial first hand information but that left alone they may not make use of these informational resources toward public ends. Similarly, drawing on recent insights about the positive contributions of frontline workers toward good governance (Tender, 1997), the problem is not personalism but, rather, the purposes personal mediation networks serve. Confirming the supposition that development is a messy, complex process, a full analysis of the local institutional matrix reveals no silver bullet solution.

Peattie's account does not indicate that after water line installation La Laja became a formal part of the city. What is clear is that AD had no interest in whether La Laja became a fully legible public space on the city urban plan or that it was incorporated into city urban planning more broadly. That outcome implied the possibility of state-society interactions without party intervention—that is, without party steering.

Hypothetically, a state institution with a developed self-interest in expanding service to such communities might have proceeded differently. This is the main upshot of Tendler's account of an activist state government in Ceará, Brazil where top policy makers placed "frontline workers" on the street for the purposes of having households "heed" the state's "advice about health or agricultural practices and raising "citizen consciousness" on a permanent basis" (Tendler, 1997, 152). Such activist government came with risks, as Tendler notes that "state government could not subsequently control what form the resulting demands would take or keep these demands from turning on state government itself" (Ibid, 152).

The main point here is that the outcomes in Ceara did not constitute possible alternatives for La Laja. To begin with, independent municipal government did not commence until 1989. As a result, unlike Tendler's three-way dynamic between civic, local and state (Tender, 1997, 147-

151), feedback loops between parties, local government, and central government could not develop. Rather, party-permeated stateness impeded the possibility of policy programs—for example, water service expansion—fostering new chains of demand making. Simply put, parties could block efforts to create alternative networks inside the bureaucracy.

It was not as if party and state competed to play foreground and background roles and that parties won and blocked the emergence of state capacities. Rather, existing patterns obviated pressures for developing others. Thus, what is so relevant about this example of party-permeated stateness is that this pattern generated goods and services provision and projected public authority, thereby relieving state institutions from having to develop indigenous capacity.

In this sense, party-permeated stateness captures one of Punto Fijo’s central contradictions and a perennial challenge of political development in post-colonial contexts. Karl’s criticism that Punto Fijo’s implicit agreement on partitioning the state meant that “administrative coherence was sacrificed to political stability” summarizes the political logic behind the disjuncture between inputs and outputs (Karl, 1997, 99). But as a broader problematic, party-permeated stateness is more than a consequence of a quid-pro-quo. It reflects a political variant of Gerschenkron’s notion about economic development: backwardness and development can coexist (Gerschenkron, 1966).

In a country without a democratic history and with an unorganized population, precocious parties heavily prioritized political stability over administrative coherence and also emphasized organization over mobilization. Parties effected notable progress when it came to effective policy-making, as measured by promoting the provision or “public order, public services, economic prosperity or inclusion” (Centeno and Ferraro, 2013, 11), benefits reaching deeply across administrative layers, and providing for and regulating the affairs of populations situated differentially by dominant cleavages of class, gender, ethnicity or race (Ibid, 11-12).

Seen in this light, the disjuncture between policy outputs and inputs speaks to a sequencing problem. Venezuelan parties leapt forward before an administrative apparatus or something like liberal civil society could develop. The Venezuelan case illustrates the difficult challenges — experienced in advanced and developing democracies alike — of building administrative inputs after producing effective policy outputs and of fostering independent forms of civic action after organizational controls settle in place. In democracy, how persuasive is it to argue, despite the outcomes, that the procedures are flawed and in need of major revision? How to overcome the ‘do not change what works’ logic?

#### *2.4 Runaway Rent Seeking: State-Society Relations During an Oil Boom*

From 1973-1977 an oil bonanza fueled the high aspirations of AD President Carlos Andres Pérez, 1974-1978. During this juncture, more money entered the state treasury than could be efficiently spent and saved. With millions of petro-dollars flooding the economy, the government struggled to find outlets to spend it efficiently. In effect, the failures to spend and save yielded a change in the purposes distribution served. AD’s distributional strategy shifted from distributing to build a mass base of support to distributing to accommodate top-level rent-seeking and expand the layers of party organization in society. This shift reoriented party leaders’ incentives toward the top of the system, thus reducing the emphasis they previously placed on providing and shaping the poorest sectors. AD evolved into a bureaucratic organization.

##### *2.4.1. Petroleum and Pérez’s Gran Venezuela*

Pérez’s administration received “more fiscal revenues than all the other Venezuelan governments since 1917 combined” (Karl, 1997, 116). The country’s fiscal income— revenue

such as taxes, fees, products and royalties collected by the state to finance the public sector—“tripled” between 1972-1975 and by 1976 Venezuela’s per-capital fiscal income equaled that of West Germany and doubled Italy’s (Karl, 1997, 120). The expansionary effects could be seen everywhere—in liquidity, GDP, demand, consumer expenditures, capital formation (Ibid). Venezuela entered what seemed to be a period of “politics without limits” (Karl, 1997, 118).

Pérez called for building ‘*La Gran Venezuela*’ (the Great Venezuela). He began by announcing measures to create a minimum wage, boost wages for employees in the public and private sector, and to establish new state offices for raising rates of public employment (Karl, 1997, 132). According to Karl, during Pérez’s Presidency, the number of “white-collar fixed-position employees working for the national government” increased from 153,971 to over 300,000 (Karl, 1997, 132). A bold tax reform died in the face of questioning about pursuing tax reforms at the very moment Venezuela was enjoying a bonanza of oil riches (Ibid, 132, 160).

Next was the 1975 nationalization of the oil industry, a step petroleum policy makers had been considering (Tugwell, 1975). Though it was billed as a practical step for wielding economic power, the maneuver came to symbolize Pérez’s statist vision of massively expanding the public sector and AD’s exploitation of this reform to pack the state with political appointees. After nationalizations in oil and other commodity industries, the public sector’s share of GDP rose from 15 percent to 43 percent (Karl, 1997, 141-142).

Pérez created state investment committees to better distribute petro-dollars to the ‘correct’ enterprises. The mismanagement and corruption that ensued in these para-state enterprises became legendary.<sup>20</sup> Behavior ranged from questionable rent-seeking practices to graft. More importantly, the sins went unpunished.

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<sup>20</sup> For a brief account of Pérez’s ‘Twelve Apostles,’ an economic clique of wealthy entrepreneurs who rose to prominence and considerably increased their wealth, see Karl, 1997 (146-151).

Scandals about dysfunction and malfeasance created bitter partisan conflict. By the end of Pérez's term, AD faced an organizational crisis. The party's historical leaders sought to defuse the crisis but their appeals fell on deaf ears. Romulo Betancourt issued a call to punish the corrupt. In an unplanned but fitting rejoinder, historical AD leader Gonzalo Barrios noted: "in Venezuela people rob because there is no reason not to" (Barrios, quoted in Karl, 1997, 158).

Some of Pérez's investments yielded income gains and infrastructure improvements. Important projects such as the building of the Gurí Dam and the Caracas metro began during Pérez. But, of course, '*La Gran Venezuela*' did not come to fruition. What is more, the expansion of the state, coupled with the massive increase in fiscal spending in the absence of accountability for corruption or regulation in the form increased tax collection, left in its wake a perverse pattern. Pérez's government became identified with highly cynical rent seeking—the seeking of specialized access to decision-makers to acquire rents in the form of profits well above "normal economic gains" (Karl, 1997, 146). At the bottom, with the government showering handouts on non-privileged societal groups, the simple flow of petro-dollars lubricated state-society relations. This exacerbated existing problems with administrative incoherence.

#### *2.4.2 Postponing Reform, Partyarchy, and Power Politics 1980-1988*

In 1980, Venezuela experienced yet another illusory oil boom. But then oil prices plummeted again in 1983, prompting the government to devalue the currency. When oil prices plateaued at low levels, policymakers at *Petroleos de Venezuela* (P.D.V.S.A.) began increasing production to compensate for lost rents and to retain market share.

The COPEI and AD governments in the 1980s, Luis Herrera Campins (1979-1983) and Jaime Lusinchi (1984-1988), faced a tradeoff between cutting back spending or incurring more

external debt. They both chose the latter. The Herrera and Lusinchi governments provided cases in point of ‘politics of postponement’ (Karl, 1997, 174-178). To avoid the political costs of cutting spending, both the Herrera and Lusinchi governments turned to international creditors to fund expenditures. Fresh from an oil boom, Venezuela became straddled with a massive foreign debt—69.7% of its GNP (Karl, 1997, 174).

The policy consensus of sowing the oil, and the tendency of leaders to avoid conflict at all cost, came under criticism from intellectuals (Naím and Pinango, 1984; Hillman, 2004). Nevertheless, the consensus remained intact and the conciliatory postures of leaders continued. In large part, resistance to change came from the dominant parties. Their dependence on petroleum rents to maintain organizational coherence and joint dominance made reform cost prohibitively high (Penfold, 2001).

It was during the 1980s when Venezuela became habituated to the *partidocracia* (Rey, 1969) Coppedge reformulated as ‘partyarchy’—rule of the parties (Coppedge, 1994a). Partyarchy was distinguished by the extent to which party rule violated the conditions for polyarchy. The term provokes some controversy because it seems to argue against strong parties. In fact, it argues against a particular structure of party institutionalization.

If measured by sheer party system strength, Punto Fijo reached its high point of institutionalization from 1973-1988 (Molina, 2004a). Indeed, the party organizations of AD and COPEI had national breadth. Functional presence in the country’s main labor, peasant, and professional organizations, and the organizational tentacles to reach down into these functional areas showed depth. At the peak levels of the state they exerted significant influence over the policy agenda through Congressional or corporatist channels (Coppedge, 1994). At the level of the



district and block, party officials played multiple problem solving roles as brokers who performed their jobs in a highly disciplined manner (Myers, 1987, 132-133).

When set in their context, these system strengths can be revealed as indicating serious weaknesses. Coppedge's account of partyarchy illuminated how the quality of party competition decreased, the recruitment of new members deteriorated into a system of inner party patron-client relations, and factions of ideology became factions of personalistic power cliques (Coppedge, 1994, 36-46). In other words, partyarchy implied more than the strengthening of tendencies, and the existence of what Venezuelans called the *partidocracia* (Rey, 1969). It captured the calcification of Punto Fijo's institutionalized political processes into an extreme version of party government marked, among other trends, by naked power struggles and high barriers of entry into decision-making arenas.

From a societal perspective, parties became electoral machines, which meant they were more bureaucratic than agents of social mobilization (Martz, 1995). As bureaucratic organizations, they primarily utilized policy to maintain existing organizational arrangements. In this respect, parties carried out infrastructural functions exclusively for their organizations, which marked a change from their role as inter-mediators that integrated top and bottom (Martz, 1987; 1995).

The narrowing of party agendas helps explain the development of new trends. First, there emerged a discourse of civil society premised on a transition to 'non-partisan' politics and group autonomy.<sup>21</sup> Second, a political impetus for decentralization grew from aspirations of breaking up party control over politics more broadly (De la Cruz, 2004). These trends advanced in the form of a growing number of civil society associations and the approval of significant decentralizations reforms (McCoy et al., 1995). But these developments could not save the system. When full-blown

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<sup>21</sup> For a critique of the emergence of civil society discourse in the Venezuelan context, see Lander (1995).

economic crisis finally struck and party organizations were engulfed in leadership crises the absence of independent state institutional capacity undermined neo-liberal reforms.

### *2.5 Unravellings: From Party-Permeated Stateness to Statelessness*

Moisés Naím helped design Carlos Andres Pérez's neo-liberal '*gran viraje*' (the great turnaround). Naím served as Perez's Minister of Trade and Industry, 1989-1992, leaving the administration one year before corruption charges forced Pérez from office. Naím's account of the *gran viraje*'s failure laments the lack of state capacity to deliver social services. He claims that when Pérez took power "all social service delivery systems had, in fact, collapsed or were performing at their minimum capacity" (Naím, 1993, 81). Then, when problems deepened in 1991 and 1992, "what little capacity remained eroded further and in some cases disappeared altogether" (Ibid). Naím mostly blames party patronage. But he also points a finger at state disorganization (Ibid).

Pérez sought to mitigate the painful effects of adjustment. But he could not implement the most basic policy measures. The lack of a basis for reliable implementation reflected the consequences of administrative incoherence. The problem was far worse than partisan meddling. O'Donnell's description of a 'brown area-like' situation marked by the "decreasing plausibility of the state as an authoritative agent of the country's interests," and state institutions becoming "incapable of implementing minimally complex policies" captures the full scope of the problems (O'Donnell, 1993, 1365). Thus, at the moment it became clear the system stopped producing outputs, the linkages with low quality administrative input became visible. But of course it was too late. The disintegration of state capacity during Pérez amounted to a chronicle of a death foretold.

### *2.5.1 A Changing Social Landscape*

Throughout the 1980s, the price of oil experienced a steady decline, marked by a 50% drop in 1986 (Gately, 1986, 238). For Venezuela this meant lower economic growth and tighter fiscal budgets. Thus at the peak of partyarchy, when parties wielded extensive political control, they had few resources to make social impact. The political consequences of this situation developed gradually. The significant drop off in public infrastructure investment sets the scene for grasping why changes in the social landscape ultimately had political repercussions.

Defining infrastructure investments in terms of public expenditures for transportation, electricity and telecommunications, water and sanitation services, Venezuelan governments from the 1950-1970s consistently invested between 4-6% of GDP in public works projects (Corrales, M.E. 2004, 234-238). Corrales found that, during this period, “on almost all indicators available, Venezuela was ahead of ‘developed’ countries in the region and well ahead of the rest of the Andean region” (Corrales, M.E., 2004, 238).

Then, in the 1980s, investment dropped to 2.5% and in the 1990s to 1.5%. Corrales argues “these rates of investment did not permit state institutions to guarantee the totals (budget) necessary for the maintenance and adequate adjustments of the existing infrastructure” (Corrales, M.E. Ibid). By 1999, when Chávez took power, Venezuela was no longer ahead of its peers in the Andean region on these development indicators. 86% of the Venezuelan population had access to potable drinking water in 1980 but only 84% enjoyed such access in 2000. Over the same period, Argentina increased coverage from 54% to 79%, Brazil from 72% to 87%, Chile from 84% to 94%, Colombia from 86% to 91%, and Peru from 50% to 77% (Ibid).

The decline in investment could be seen in other service areas. Roberts reports that in 1993 per capita social spending was 40 percent below the 1980 level, with appreciable cuts in spending on education, housing and urban development, health care and social development programs (Roberts, 2003, 59). Venezuela's social landscape looked dramatically different than the one Punto Fijo inherited and maintained.

The landscape was marked by three trends: declining living standards, the polarization of incomes, and the growing ranks of informally employed urban residents (Roberts, 2003, 58). Instead of a multi-class landscape marked by a large middle sector, Venezuela seemed to be moving toward a bipolar economy with more than half the population in either a working poor or below the poverty line situation. In addition to the deterioration in services, incomes dropped off significantly, with real industrial and minimum wages standing at less than "40 percent of their 1980s levels by the late 1990s" (Roberts, 2003, 59). Poverty climbed from 36 percent to 66 percent and extreme poverty from 11 percent to 36 percent between 1984 and 1994. Meanwhile, income distribution skewed heavily in favor of the upper classes. The income share of the poorest 40 percent fell from 19.1 percent in 1981 to 14.7 percent in 1997. The shares of the richest increased from 21.8 percent to 32.8 percent (Roberts, 2003, 60). Last, the informal economy expanded. Over the same time period, the informally employed grew from 34.5 percent to 53 percent in 1999 (Ibid).

### *2.5.2. The Caracazo Rupture*

The formula of party-mediated state-society relations serving to distribute goods down to the bases depended on a steady flow of petro-dollars. In turn, party-permeated stateness involved state institutions being physically present in barrios, party brokers personally mediating the delivery of goods to barrio leaders, and party officials serving as husbands. But, with resources

for distribution dwindling, there were fewer goods and services that needed gatekeeping, and with the organizational landscape languishing, the moment called for new seeding, not cultivation. In short, the basis for gatekeeping dissipated and the organizational landscape for husbandry went neglected.

If party infrastructural capacity had been all that collapsed, then a degree of stateness might have endured. There might have been breadth without depth, a present state with some credibility. The events of the Caracazo—the ‘violent shake of Caracas’ on February 27, 1989—and *los saqueos*—looting across the country—dashed that possibility.<sup>22</sup>

Perez’s neo-liberal technocrats proposed scaling back the state’s role in the economy, privatizing state industries, and slashing the state workforce (Naím, 1993). These reforms fit with international prescriptions for sounder macro-economic governance. But they also, of course, had economic and political motivations. Privatizations hoped to reduce the economic role of the public sector. Proposals to consolidate state agencies implied efforts to reduce party influence over the state. But before these changes could take place the *Gran Viraje* imploded in the social disturbances of the *Caracazo*.

The events of the *Caracazo* began with protests over transportation. Companies raised bus fares in response to rising fuel costs—an effect of the government’s lifting of gasoline subsidies. This struck a sensitive chord. Venezuela’s depressed cost of gasoline represented the policy legacy of runaway rent-seeking fostered by the petro-state.

With the costs of basic goods and services increasing, economic difficulties created a storm of looting, riots, and protests among barrio popular sectors. State repression of protests ensued and left an official death toll of 350, though human rights groups estimate over 1000 died (Coronil and

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<sup>22</sup> In fact, violent shakes occurred in most of Venezuela’s urbanized centers, and the Caracazo actually started in the city suburb of Guarenas.

Skurski, 2006). During the *Caracazo* the night watchman state wielded its stick violently and heavily against barrios, the spaces presumed to be the breeding ground for hooliganism. The cycle of social upheaval and state repression left Punto Fijo morally bankrupt and created a sharp disjuncture between top and bottom.

Pérez's government steadied after the tremors of the *Caracazo* and the year of economic tumult. But the event left indelible marks. Amidst adjustments, in 1989 the economy shrank 10%, real salaries declined 11%, and inflation rose to 90%. Reforms did boost economic growth 7.1% and 10.4% but not until 1990 and 1991, respectively. Moreover, foreign direct investment poured in over the same time period (Naím, 1993, 62-70).

The keys to understanding the story lie in the sequence. These positive economic developments took place after Pérez's popular approval plummeted amid austerity's severe effects on social welfare. Corruption scandals began appearing with unusual frequency. News breaks of this sort implied political infighting, not whistle blowing, as AD lost ground to rivals COPEI and new Left-wing party *La Causa R. Labor*, AD's core coalition, remained outraged about adjustment's effects.

In February 1992 Lt. Colonel Chávez led the failed coup that turned him into a folk hero. In the wake of the coup, polling revealed that 81% of the population had lost confidence in the President (Karl, 1997, 182). In August, Pérez attempted to implement a second austerity package. Interestingly, this reform included new tax policies for raising the rates on personal income and capital assets. Labor leaders made the highly unusual move of openly questioning an AD administration and opposition from COPEI doomed the prospects for a reform aimed at changing core aspects of the petro-state's rentier model. In November, another coup attempt took place.

After three decades of coup-free politics—during which, to be sure, unrest occasionally had violent expressions—Venezuela experienced two coups in 1992.

The floodgates of criticism came open in 1992. Corruption accusations shined a light on questionable acts inside the Executive Office. On May 20, 1993 the Supreme Court held hearings to indict Pérez on embezzlement of \$17 million in government funds. After the Senate backed this action with impeachment hearings, the President left office in disgrace (Karl, 1997, 184). Pérez's highly ambitious attempt to manage economic problems through neo-liberal structural reform had backfired. A caretaker President, Ramon J. Velasquez, stepped in for Pérez's last year while anti-party sentiment reached historic highs.

State institutions and political parties began what can be thought of as a massive withdrawal from community affairs. The state was broke, parties were shells of their former selves and no one seemed to deliver on promises any longer. Moreover, after the Caracazo skepticism about state officials grew into distrust of the institutions they represented. Party-mediated state-society relations no longer projected public authority. The state lost the credibility that had accrued to it through party husbandry in society.

### *2.5.3. Caldera, Centrifugal Forces, and Virtual Statelessness*

The government of Rafael Caldera (1994-1998) symbolized the centrifugal forces that came to define state-society relations in the final years of Punto Fijo. With ordinary Venezuelans fleeing the traditional political parties they no longer identified with (Molina, 2004; Roberts, 2003), Caldera, a founding father of COPEI and an original signatory of the Punto Fijo pact, followed suit. In 1993, he deserted COPEI, the political party he founded, to boost his chances for the Presidency. Caldera ran on the ticket of *Convergencia*, a personalist party, and he struck a key

coalition with Left-wing party *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement to Socialism, MAS). The strategy divided the electorate into three blocks: support for an historical figure in Caldera, a newcomer from the Left in Andres Velasquez, and COPEI's candidate. In an election where turnout reached a record low of 60 percent, Caldera won a plurality, which was sufficient (Molina, 2004, 158).

Caldera's plurality victory implied a weak mandate. Caldera did not make a major impact. With oil prices hovering at lows between \$12-\$18 per barrel, and hyperinflation of over 100% (in 1996) eating into incomes, Caldera's job grew all the more difficult (Kelly and Palma, 2004, 209). Meanwhile, with parties no longer playing roles as gatekeepers of services or husbands of associational development, and the neutrality of the night watchman state in doubt, centrifugal forces dominated barrio-system relations.

It is possible to identify three characteristics in the interactions between public institutions and popular sectors. First, residents grew deeply suspicious of public officials who rarely kept their promises and could no longer turn to parties for assistance. Second, base level community groups, such as the then-popular *Asociaciones de Vecinos* (Neighborhood Associations) returned to their roots of self-provision in what mapped out as a trend of community-centric collective action. In effect, groups concentrated their energies on developing homegrown solution to problems the state seemed incapable of addressing efficiently. Third, because lack of basic goods provision by state and parties was not replaced by the emergence of effective market mechanisms, popular sector actors were left without access to resource crucial to one's quality of life. Consequently, collective action turned towards highly pragmatic goals (Gómez Calcaño, 1998).

The second trend of community-centric collective action caught the attention of researchers examining civil society more broadly. McCoy and Smith argued that a broad cross-section of



Venezuelans began to see the state “as the source of their problems,” signifying a context in which groups became less interested in “accessing or controlling state power” and more concerned with “autonomy from the state and the parties that controlled it” (McCoy and Smith, 1995, 254). In the arena of urban popular sectors, though, autonomy did not bespeak withdrawal from the public domain (E. Lander, 1995; Salamanca, 1995; Gómez Calcaño, 1998). Especially when it came to basic service matters, popular sector actors reoriented their collective action within the public arena to developing self-help or community-centric solutions before turning to the state.

In light of these centrifugal forces, parties’ withdrawal, and the rupture that opened between state and society over the state’s legitimacy as the night watchman, the structure of stateness devolved into one of virtual statelessness. Outside groups from civil society, religious organizations and professional non-governmental organizations began to replace parties in the sense their presence in barrios became fairly commonplace (Smilde, 2007). Though civil society groups occasionally operated as state contractors, their civic nature reduced the extent to which they projected stateness or public authority.

With state institutions no longer confident their presence was welcome at this bottom layer, the state pulled back, reducing the breadth of its presence. In light of withdrawal, societal groups made do on their own through self-provision or community-oriented forms of collective action. The barrios became more like self-contained enclaves than at any other point since Punto Fijo. They became zones of virtual statelessness or places where the degree of territorial penetration and functional effectiveness was “very low or nil level” (O’Donnell, 1993, 1359).

## Conclusions

Wrote Fernando Coronil, “the myth of Venezuela as a wealthy democratic nation steadily advancing toward modernity continued to hold into the 1990s despite problems that had become

evident by 1978” (Coronil, 1997, 368). Punto Fijo elites’ decade and a half-long state of denial, during which politics as usual continued, paved the way for a change of massive proportions. To be sure, the collapse of Punto Fijo as a complex of party-permeated state-society relations generated game changing repercussions.

It not only made it possible for Chávez to rise as an outsider with an independent streak. It created the conditions for him to emerge as a “man of the people, the embodiment of the patriotic leader committed to fulfilling the populist premise of national sovereignty and social equity” (Coronil, 1997, 379). Thus, Punto Fijo’s collapse went hand in hand with a breaking apart of the social map constructed by party organizations and the delinking of a demand chain structure state institutions managed under parties’ guidance.

### *Punto Fijo, Chávez, and Chavismo*

Particularly noteworthy here was the transformation of barrio spaces from domains of buzzing interaction between top and bottom to areas detached from top level institutions and increasingly characterized by self-help solutions to particularistic problems. In some accounts, change at the bottom fits into a romantic narrative of Chávez as the popular sector hero who returns to his roots once in power. The story is of course more complex.

Outside his core group of political counselors and ideological kin in the military, some of the most symbolically powerful forms of support for Chávez came from the barrios where public authority had disintegrated and the quality of life had degenerated. The ‘misery of the barrios,’ as Chávez often described it, did not provoke ideological support for Chávez’s candidacy. Rather, it disillusioned barrio residents to the point where many felt: “*que se vayan todos!*” (throw all the bums out!). Chávez was a public opinion phenomenon in the context of historical organizations’

decomposition. In this context, an alternative with a different social profile seemed to deserve the same opportunity afforded to previous Presidential candidates who also promised “progress” and “paradise” amid woeful realities (Cabrujas, 1987, 17, quoted in Coronil, 1997, 371).

What did the breakup in the pattern of party-mediated state-society relations have to do with chavismo? Punto Fijo’s collapse bequeathed a situation in which there were few resources to control and an organizational landscape with few relationships that needed conserving. In other words, gatekeeping and husbandry became inoperative processes.

Instead, during the first term of the Chávez government, dismantling and midwifing became the operative process. On the one hand, Chávez took a veritable machete to the system and cut away the institutional vestiges that opposition parties used to maintain leverage over society. On the other hand, the charismatic leader at the top and Left-wing activists situated in the bureaucracy fashioned the state into a tool for bringing forth mobilization, a process that first required some building blocks at the bottom. Still, these two steps were easier said than done. For the state to play a midwifery role, institutions first had to face basic bridge building challenges to reestablish state presence, as argued in Chapter Three. The barrios had transitioned, I argued, into enclaves of informal self-government highly suspicious of institutional actors from the top.

However, it is crucial to underscore that Chávez came to power as a consequence of Punto Fijo’s collapse, not as a result of state collapse. Amid Punto Fijo’s collapse and the undermining of party-mediated stateness at the barrio level, decentralization began. Decentralization reforms, which began in 1989, failed to re-legitimize democracy. But they helped placed local government—at the state, municipal, and sub-municipal levels—at the center of the agenda. In this respect, Chapter Two, which examines key ideational, political, and institutional trends at the local level, provides significant insights for making sense of the character of base level

mobilization processes sponsored by chavismo. The overlapping of collapse at the national level and emergence at the local yielded a context in which the state was dysfunctional but its fluid institutional structure provided political actors with a means to develop governance instruments.

### *State Capacity and Stateness*

Beyond the political effects of Punto Fijo's breakdown, what does this historical account of party-permeated stateness contribute to the research agenda on state capacity? First we learned that parties or like political organizations need to be part of the discussion about infrastructural capacity. Second, the role of parties in the infrastructural puzzle is not easy to decipher. Despite AD and COPEI's successes at promoting development across sub-national and social divides, their efforts failed to translate into enduring forms of state presence whereby civil servants could gain the ability to quantify needs and render society legible for planning's sake. Thus, in the Venezuelan case, a two-party structure fulfilling infrastructural functions undermined the building of state infrastructural power. These failings provide some indication why reformers placed hope behind decentralization as a 'non-partisan' initiative (López Maya and Gómez-Calcaño, 1989).

Third, despite party infrastructural capacity failing to link up with state institutions to produce, for example, administrative competence, we learned something else about stateness. Even a minimal degree of stateness can make a significant difference to the most disadvantaged populations. That is to say, when party-permeated stateness existed in places like La Laja, the state could accomplish development goals through parties. Moreover, its officers could interact with the population with some degree of legitimacy.

Fourth, from the point that stateness possesses independent value, we learn it is important to not interchange the terms stateness and state capacity. Likewise, it is a mistake to shortchange

the importance of the former. When a degree of stateness does not amount to overall capacity, its simple existence can provide a foundation for infusing state-society interactions with social predictability and functional value. If state presence is only a condition of possibility, then what forms of state penetration can serve as a linchpin for scaling up state and societal interactions?

“I may mention here, since we are on politics, that the Doolittle raspberries had sprawled all over the strawberry-beds: so true is it that politics makes strange bedfellows.”

Charles Dudley Warner, *My Summer in a Garden*, Fifteenth Week, 1870, p. 88

“Far from starting with a pre-established party structure and working on behalf of it and its interests, we are confident that the movement of masses can take in its hands the task of producing, within its own fold, a new leadership”

Alfredo Maneiro, Founder of *La Causa R*, 1971, quoted in Ellner, 1988, 160

“The possible course of action is revising the constitution in light of the people’s right, not so much to elect representatives as to decide about issues.... I see this process realized in places where the people have organized existences, where the *people is the body of something*. The educative communities, the unions and federations, the cooperatives, the social projects underway, the neighborhood associations, the youth groups.... from these underway processes about discussing and deciding on issues we need to shape a document that expresses our desire to live in freedom and justice”

Santiago Arconada, 1992, April, SIC, 143 “For a Constituent Assembly,” my emphasis

## Chapter 2: From the Streets to the State: Basismo, Decentralization, and the Venezuelan Left at the Local Level

When Charles Dudley Warner coined the saying ‘politics makes strange bedfellows’ he had a gardening problem on his mind. Complaining about the incursion of Doolittle raspberries into a bed of strawberries, Warner wrote “so true is it that politics makes strange bedfellows” (Warner, 1870, 88).<sup>23</sup> In today’s vernacular, ‘politics makes strange bedfellows’ refers to a seemingly paradoxical situation—groups with different perspectives converging on the same ground to pursue mutually expedient cooperation. Such examples of convergence raise interesting questions about motive—that is, whether principle or opportunism is the driving force of action. They also draw attention to an important question about unintended consequences. Do the converging groups join up to form a coalition? Does the coalition become an enduring arrangement? Do groups rethink their positions? Do bedfellows evolve into partners?

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<sup>23</sup> The full quotation is “I may mention here, since we are on politics, that the Doolittle raspberries had sprawled all over the strawberry-beds: so true is it that politics makes strange bedfellows” (Charles Dudley Warner, *My Summer in a Garden*, Fifteenth Week, 1870, p. 88).

### *Populism's Strange Bedfellows: The Military and Popular Sectors*

Latin American populism brings the strange bedfellows phenomenon into sharp relief. Populist political movements have often featured coalitions made up of strongman leaders and popular sector support groups—Dictator Getulio Vargas as the ‘Father of the Poor’ in Brazil and former Army Colonel Juan Domingo Perón as responsible for the awakening of the Argentine working class are two prominent examples (Weffort, 1998; Di Tella, 1965; Conniff, 2012). Standard accounts examining the puzzle of a top-down and bottom-up political coalition center on self-interest. The military strongman seeks out the support of masses for the politically expedient objective of legitimizing his rule while underprivileged masses support a government to receive social assistance in return. Influential accounts on populism capture this point about an exchange relationship. Weffort claims that populism implies a kind of deceptive empowerment: “a decisive and concrete manipulation of the popular sectors that also represented a means for the expression of their concerns” (Weffort, 1998, 136). De la Torre’s notion of “populist seduction” suggests populism is a performative process that implies a style of mobilization that ultimately misleads popular sectors because it lacks the substance of a sustainable model (de la Torre, 2000, 2010).

Like all political movements, populism is a complex of interests that entails opportunities for material transactions such as patronage and handouts. But, there is often uncertainty about whether the opportunity will come to fruition. In the same vein, transactional opportunities are not necessarily manifest from the outset of a populist political movement's rise. When a personalistic leader is in the process of developing their initial constituency, what factors attract groups and prominent individuals to lend support? Why did some parts of the military and some Left-wing parties support Chávez from the moment he first gained prominence?

The support of military groups for Chávez is easier to explain. Trinkunas argues that for military leaders' self-interest in expanding their control to civilian institutions outweighed normative commitments to professionalism (Trinkunas, 2004). Roughly, they traded a reputation of institutional professionalism for power. Ellner (2007), Fernandes (2010), and Ciccariello-Maher (2013) all suggest that Left-wing groups and Chávez shared a vision of radical change, and that this common ideological position drew the Left to Chávez's camp. There is truth to this claim but it implies a narrative of progressivism in which the Left becomes chavismo. In such a narrative, the story neglects how party collapse and institutional change reshaped Venezuelan politics and created unanticipated opportunities for the Left as Chávez broke onto the scene.

### *Ideational and Institutional Origins of Chavismo*

To better explain why Leftwing groups became part of the chavista coalition, it is crucial to examine the specific context that shaped Chávez's rise and entailed favorable conditions for a framework of political mobilizing supported by the Left. This context is crucial because the origins of chavismo as a case of populism refer not only to Chávez's rise as an outsider in the wake of a party system's collapse. As argued in Chapter 1, Chávez shot to national prominence amid a particular institutional juncture – the breakdown of party-permeated stateness, which implied a process of state withdrawal from society. While party collapse produced a leadership vacuum Chávez ably filled, the break down of party-permeated stateness at the base level produced an opportunity for chavismo to build a power base at the bottom of the system. However, to build at the bottom chavismo needed to not only hold onto power in the face of threats to regime stability but to develop a plan for using institutions to reestablish state presence and mobilize support.



Before chavismo undertook a national level strategy to form a mass constituency at the bottom, political and community activists who became chavistas began shaping local level political spaces—arenas created by decentralization reforms enacted in 1989—into venues for block-level mobilization. From 1992 to 1995, Libertador, the largest municipality of Caracas, provided the scene for a process of policy experimentation highly relevant for comprehending the ideational roots of mobilization under chavismo. Left-wing party *La Causa R* (The Radical Cause, LCR) won the Libertador Mayor's Office and began a policy experiment titled 'Governing from the Parish.' The policy evoked the spirit of decentralization since it referred to governing from the most local level—parishes are akin to wards in that they are the lowest level of state jurisdiction below municipality. Beginning in 1992 the *junta parroquial*—parish committee—was elected through direct popular elections.

LCR's municipal administration of Libertador furthered an underway process of party platform moderation—in the 1980s LCR transitioned from a radical Left-wing party that opposed electoral participation to a reformist Left party. Through governing, the party developed acute awareness, and acceptance, of a paradox that characterized thinking on the Latin American Left throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This experience governing Caracas introduced the party to a governmental perspective on local participation—the value of de-centered state-society interactions for increasing state presence in the barrios and for expanding public officials' capabilities to reach down into society to implement programs. In the same vein, the experience illustrated how government could play a central role in expanding the terms of popular participation to include planning and urban development. As a result, the party's thinking evolved. Its program not only channelled basismo, an influential Latin American philosophy of political

action ‘by and for’ the bases of society (Lehmann, 1990, 190, 186).<sup>24</sup> LCR accepted that these tensions held creative potential—the possibility of using policy mechanisms to broaden popular sector actors’ engagement in public planning while the state also gained enhanced administrative capabilities in barrio spaces (Goldfrank, 2011a).

### *Incremental Changes and Their Legacies*

Governing from the Parish did not become a Libertador municipal government institution. But, it created an important legacy for LCR and, more broadly, for the Left’s relationship with chavismo. Activists that first joined hands during LCR’s Governing from the Parish initiative went on to form policy networks as officials in the Chávez government. LCR alumni not only received prominent appointments in Chávez’s cabinet, they also went on to write parts of the Constitution and formulate policies for stimulating mobilization (Goldfrank, 2011b, 168).

Thus, examining the ideational and institutional developments surrounding the LCR’s efforts to gain political power at the local level helps explain not only some parts of the Left’s support for Chávez but also provides context for tracing Leftwing groups’ impact on chavismo’s character as a political movement in power. Moreover, LCR’s Governing from the Parish policy was the result of interplay between basismo and decentralization and this experience had two main legacies: a) the decision by the succeeding AD administration to repeal an ordinance making Governing from the Parish a required part of municipal administration solidified belief among experience participants that only an outsider such as Chávez could produce real change and b) the

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<sup>24</sup> Literally, basismo means belief in the base of society. But in Latin America the term base has a strong popular connotation—as the socio-political attributes of shantytown or marginal places. *Los bases* is widely understood as referring not to a level of the system but to the popular sectors, an urban segment characterized by their working or lower class position and by cultural tendencies developed in the context of informal living conditions. I chose basismo over grassroots to more clearly capture the sociological connotation of base as a popular sector segment.

advances and setbacks of the experience shaped some future chavistas' thinking about political administration by illustrating the value of establishing state presence at the base level, and teaching lessons about how to promote community mobilization via policy mechanisms that called for incorporation via urban planning.

### *Roadmap*

First, this chapter traces the trajectory of basismo as a normative tendency that shaped political mobilization, especially on the Latin American Left. I begin by examining the intellectual history of direct popular participation in Latin America, and then show how basismo reinforced belief in the importance of such policies. I highlight two important contributions made by basismo: helping redefine the meaning of political by articulating a compelling defense of direct popular participation as a process with opportunities for popular empowerment and helping policy makers cast direct popular participation as an opportunity to rethink authority relations between those organizing mobilization and those put in motion by it. Second, I discuss the ways that two segments of the Venezuelan Left became bearers of a basista style of mobilizing amid political decentralization. I briefly discuss basismo-related initiatives pursued by popular associations and Left-wing party *La Causa R* (The Radical Cause, LCR). This discussion illustrates how basismo informed these groups' efforts to define themselves as alternatives to the Punto Fijo system's dominant arrangements in civil and political society. Third, I examine the LCR's experience governing Caracas from 1992-1995 and show how its main achievements captured fragments of a deepened governance model and illustrated the promise of the local level for promoting democratization. In the conclusion I extrapolate from these developments to the macro-level by

drawing linkages between basismo and decentralization, on the one hand, and between basismo and chavismo's origins on the other.

## I. Democratic Transitions, Local Participation, and *Basismo*

Beginning in the early 1980s, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile initiated transitions from authoritarian rule' (O'Donnell, et al., 1986). Transitions in these three politically influential countries raised the prospect of a watershed moment of change across all South America—a change in the dominant regime type from authoritarian to democratic rule. Progress was not always smooth but, arguably, this change in dominant regime type came to fruition by the early 1990s.<sup>25</sup>

As democratic regimes emerged, issues pertaining directly to the quality of democracy slowly moved to the forefront. Issues such as protecting human rights drew attention to underlying social and political challenges. These challenges spoke to the question of democracy's moral center (Jelin and Hershberg, 1996). Some issues did not respond easily to policy making. For example, notwithstanding truth and reconciliation commissions about human rights violations during the military-authoritarian period, the issue of human rights proved difficult to translate into policy. Other issues pertaining to political rights were more amenable to policy treatment.

### *Local Participation: Straight from the Ground Up?*

Local participation provided a feasible way to make the political system more socially inclusive. Local participation referred to a territorial level and a social place—the setting and its

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<sup>25</sup> As measured by founding elections, democracy took root in this order: Uruguay (1984), Bolivia (1985), Argentina (1986), Brazil (1989), Chile (1989), Paraguay (1993), and finally in Mexico (2000). Venezuela and Colombia lived under democracy since 1958 and Costa Rica since 1948. Ecuador and Peru experienced transitions beginning in the late 1970s while war-torn Central American republics lurched between electoral regimes and democracy in the 1980s and 1990s.

venues. For example, the municipality, the local political-administrative layer of the political system, provided the setting while sub-municipal or parish-level forums provide the venues where groups participated about community affairs. Arguably, the most important aspect of local participation concerns its direct nature. Direct participation refers to the fact that those participating have some form of firsthand interaction with state officials (Cameron, et al., 2013). Local processes of direct participation are not insulated from partisan politics. They simply imply the existence of at least one channel for direct state-citizen interaction.

Policies for local participation raised hopes both for change in a specific arena and for broader transformations. They lifted expectations for broadening the inclusion of popular sector actors in everyday or civic politics at the local level. More broadly, Oxhorn suggests that the direct community participation by popular sector actors would invigorate democracy from below (Oxhorn, 1998). Similarly, Nickson argued that “creation of participatory mechanisms for dialogue and consensus building at the municipal level became essential ingredients for strengthening the long-term prospects of democracy and for containing social tensions” (Nickson, 1995, 85).

Broadly speaking, across Latin America, policy mechanisms for local participation raised three specific themes--the basic components of a local democracy agenda. First, local participation incorporated efforts to raise popular sectors’ visibility in democracy. In some ways, this represented an effort to continue an historical struggle. Popular sector groups helped galvanize the struggle against authoritarian rule (Keck, 1992; Schneider, 1995; Roberts, 1998). Because popular sector groups’ participation seemed to signify that they could overcome adverse conditions for collective action, their public involvement became a symbolic rallying point—a sign of why it was worthwhile to keep hope alive for the anti-authoritarian struggle. Moreover, it arguably followed that popular sector actors’ participation could flourish under democracy’s more organizing friendly

conditions. Above all, the visibility issue boiled down to symbolic politics. Popular sector actors' participation served as a measure of the degree to which lower classes experienced self-government.

Second, local participation responded to the recent history of exclusionary political systems. Different visions of what constituted empowering forms of direct participation tended to correlate with contending positions about proposals for addressing social exclusion. For example, the proposals to formally include citizen voices in policy planning commission consultations, and to generate opportunities for groups to petition local officials, tended to receive different evaluations (Nickson 1995). Marxist-inspired movements tended to dismiss such commissions as attempts at mollification, behind which lay power holders' conservative goals of containing social tensions. Non-Marxist Left groups tended to interpret such forms of participation differently. Roughly, these were opportunities to begin a debate about what empowerment entailed. Meta-level conceptions of empowerment as either a disruption of the status quo to grab state power and transform society or as a process of acquiring political experience, knowledge and skills carried important implications. These conceptions of empowerment shaped actors' varying receptivity toward local participation.

Third, local participation spoke to a means for democratizing the governance arrangements underpinning political order. Once again, two contending visions of democratization on the Left help illustrate what strategic goals direct participation served. One hardline anarchist-inspired understanding of democratization argued that popular sector participation needed to be completely autonomous from institutions and unapologetically disruptive in its public actions. All on its own, the dismantling of institutions constituted democratization. A softer Left position, which I lay out below as closely related to the normative tendency of basismo, developed a two-tiered

interpretation. It held that disruptive participation could be productive by breaking down power networks. As such, participation needed to turn the “world upside down” by re-presenting the world: engendering a heightened “physical presence of the grassroots” in politics to in turn facilitate the “overcoming and undermining” of “unwarranted forms of domination” (Lehmann, 1990, 192).

### *Basismo, A Normative Tendency*

The term *basismo* evokes a set of overlapping images and meanings. First, compared with grassroots, which refers primarily to a level, the term *base* distinctively combines level and position. In this respect, I use base in the sociological sense of a concept that links discrete activities with big structures. Here, base refers not only to bottom level but to base of a society. Second, *base* is comparable but also different from popular, which links economic and cultural terms. A base is a ‘base of’ something larger—an institutional hierarchy, for example, that contains bottom level groups whose social dislocation is distinctively intelligible in light of their specific place (Levine, 1990, 10). Thus, activists reference ‘*los bases*’ as a subunit of the popular sectors to capture ways in which a “piece of territory brings together the contradictions in society” and to thereby stress territorialisation—“the stage on which societal processes take place” (Riveire d’Arc, 1999, 205).

There is something crucial about the literal meaning of *basismo* as ‘belief in the bases.’ Indeed, *basismo* is not a political platform. Parties or movements do not identify as *basistas*. Instead, basismo operates more like a paradigm. It exists in the background as a framework informing priorities for political action. As such, it is best understood as a normative tendency; it existed in different forms and intensities across time and space. To capture basismo’s varied

manifestations I call attention to two variants: an ends-oriented emancipative-Marxist variant and a process-oriented popular-Catholic variant.

### *Basismo as a Means to an End*

Nickson locates a strand of *basismo* in 1970s era Left-wing circles, particularly those in Peru (Nickson, 1995). The key organizational process behind *basismo*'s prominence there was the late 1970s fusion between the radical Catholics—represented by Gustavo Gutiérrez's 1968-founded coordinating organization called the National Social Information Office—and the United Left party (Pásara, 1989, 290). Nickson describes *basismo* as a school of thought emerging in opposition to top-down forms of participation proposed by state power holders. This strand of *basismo* responded to three criticisms Left-wing organizers frequently made about a) “consultative mechanisms that channeled citizen demands and information to and from municipal authorities,” b) programs that gave citizens “an audit role in checking up on the probity and efficiency of municipal action,” and c) invitations for “direct community involvement in municipal investment programs, usually in the form of voluntary labor contributions” (Nickson, 1995, 87). It proposed defending popular sectors from exposure to liberal democracy's false opportunities. In this view, consultative or collaborative participation constituted concessions to a non-reformable system. This criticism reveals a highly paternalistic posture; it protects agents from exposure to liberalism.

Critics did propose alternatives. They centered on working up from grassroots group “autonomy” to create instances of an “ill-defined ideal of direct democracy” where local groups wielded direct powers over local decision-making (Nickson, 1995, 87). In theory, these would serve as examples of ‘*los bases*’ of society actualizing self-government rights or fulfilling demands



for empowerment—in other words, self-management.<sup>26</sup> It would be convenient to describe the emancipative variant of *basismo* as empirically bounded and analytically distinct from the popular Catholic variant. But the reality is a bit more complex. Marxist groups that preached a highly utopian vision of direct democracy tended to cluster in the same spaces where Catholic interpretations of *basismo* emerged. Inevitably, themes overlapped.

### *Basismo as a Process*

One of the challenges presented by *basismo* is the analytic task of weaving praxis and theory together. Paulo Freire, arguably one of *basismo*'s founders, eloquently captured this very point. He argued 'reflection' and 'action' are mutually constitutive of words and that "there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis" (Freire, 1968, 75). In this vein, making sense of *basismo*'s emergence requires examining both the innovative work and writing of actors like Freire and the changing patterns in Church thinking, beginning with the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965 (Vatican II) and continuing through the Medellin and Puebla meetings of the Latin American Bishops Council in 1968 and 1979, respectively. I move from Freire's work to the progressive Church's evolved thinking and then return to organizational expressions, both of *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs) and other groups, bearing the imprint of these actors.

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian professor of Social Work. Working from Brazil's northeastern city of Recife, Freire launched programs that promoted literacy and immersed professional teachers in the lay world of popular education. These programs became the 'basic education

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<sup>26</sup> Rosa Luxembourge's notion of the 'General Strike' as a form of democracy rejecting co-optation through permanent movement and construction comes close to capturing this ideal.

movement’—a state, Church, and international development agency-funded effort to promote literacy and immerse teachers, students, and volunteers in the lay world of popular education.<sup>27</sup>

Lehmann suggests the movement’s Portuguese name, *Movimento de Educação de Base* (MEB), constitutes an original usage of the term *base* in reference to popular mobilization. In 1961 the MEB’s annual report described the movement’s programs as focused on “taking into account the full dimensions of man and using all the authentic processes of *conscientização*. This should be undertaken from a perspective of *self-promotion* and lead to a decisive transformation of mentalities and structures” (Freire, quoted in Lehmann, 1990, 98, my emphasis). The recurrence of themes of educator accompaniment of students and of feedback loops from the educated to the educator suggest more than Freire’s interest in Hegelian dialectics. Freire wrote about the fruits of a radical pedagogy: “political action on the side of the oppressed must be pedagogical action in the authentic sense of the word, and, therefore, action with the oppressed” (Freire, 1968, 53)

For Freire, *conscientização*, which is mostly captured by the notion of developing critical consciousness over an ever-expanding field of experience, was important in two respects. First, the method for generating *conscientização* is based on a dialogue that develops through a “relation of ‘empathy’ between two ‘poles’ who are engaged in a joint search” (Freire, 1973, 45). Second, through this “communication and intercommunication” (Ibid), *conscientização* would help popular sectors avoid massification—masses led astray by “superficial and empty ideas” (Lehmann, 1990, 98). At this everyday level, *conscientização* would reformulate ‘leader-people’ relations and contribute to democratization.

Around the time Freire’s activism began to make headway, the Vatican held its Second Council (Vatican II), 1961-1963. Simplifying a big process, Vatican II set in motion a change in

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<sup>27</sup> This section draws on Lehmann, Chapter Three: “The Church Returns to Centre Stage” (Lehmann, 1990, 88-148).

the Church from a “perfect, unchanging, and hierarchically ordered institutions” to a model of a “Pilgrim Church” for “People of God”—a living, changing community of the faithful making its way through history“ (Levine, 1986, 8). Levine argues that although the Church’s concern for the poor remained roughly constant, its mode of interacting with poor people changed along with church doctrine’s acceptance of “historical change, both as a simple fact to be accepted and as a source of new, valid values” (Ibid). In this respect, the Church became grounded in the conditions that helped give rise to social ferment and conflict throughout the developing world.

The explicit linking of Christianity to Latin American social conditions took place at the 1968 Latin American Bishops Conference in Medellín. There, structural understandings of violence, and associated understandings of institutionalized oppression, gained ground (Levine, Ibid, 10). This was hugely important. If the Church considered violence and exclusion structural matters, then political action became a plausible response for Church groups to address these sins. In some cases, the Church's efforts went beyond outreach to the poor. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, for example, initiatives for “identifying with the poor, promoting change, challenging structures of power and authority in the name of justice” unfolded (Levine, 1986, 12). In Brazil, where revolution was not the most discussed option, Bishops recommended that Church leaders create *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (Christian Base Communities, CEBs) among the poor (Lehmann, 1990, 101). These latter experiences, some of which predated the 1968 Bishops' Conference in Medellín, placed the issue of local participation front and center.

The CEBs defy generalization but they shared three characteristics: they were “small groups,” also they were “usually homogenous in social composition (based on class and neighborhood or village),” and they gathered “regularly to read and comment on the bible” (Levine, 1986, 14). The CEBs symbolized a vision of the Church. Likewise, their practice provides

a kind of microcosm of what role the laity should play in that vision of a Church. The CEBs are the foundation of a Church in which “everything revolves around the People of God” (Boff, 1985, quoted in Lehmann, 1990, 133). But it bears repeating that the CEBs were not attempts to usurp Church authorities or create an order without authority. Rather, they are instances in which ecclesiastical authority is reconfigured. Base communities had the “task” to correct the inherent tendencies of hierarchy that privilege the “rich and powerful” (Lehmann, 1990, 133). By the same token, a renovation of the Church from below depends on the fostering of a less “ceremonial” environment (Ibid, 1990, 134). This de-formalization is grounded in a communitarian style marked by “face-to-face experience” and “personal relationships” overtaking “impersonal authority and complex organization” (Ibid, 1990, 134).

Two ideals present in these descriptions of the Catholic Church roots of *basimo* and the CEBs’ practice need to be underscored. One, the Church roots of *basismo* helps explain activists’ hope for an organic oneness between different social actors so that “all learn from all” and “no one has a monopoly of wisdom” (Lehmann, 1990, 134). Second, writing about the CEBs exhibits a bias for a ‘small is beautiful’ ethos—the idea that successful collective action is more likely when the scale is localized.

Of course, neither of the ideals worked exactly as theorized. First, for example, educated activists, either Jesuits or academics such as Freire, needed recruits. Even if the idea was to learn from each other, it was clear the recruiters already possessed the educational resources to succeed in society. Second, the CEBs were “numerous, decentralized and small” (Lehmann, 1990, 135). But they also tended to “sprout up, decay and disappear” (Ibid, 135). With the CEBs characterized by “intermittence and ephemerality,” the emergence and submergence of the groups posed a challenge for making grander sense of their contributions to associative life (Ibid, 206).

### *Redefining 'The Political' and Rethinking Authority*

A student of basismo in Brazil describes it as an “inheritance of ideological trends” within the European Left and the popular or progressive Brazilian Church (Riveire d’Arc, 1999, 199-200). Yet, basismo is not reducible to its ideological roots. *Basismo* became embedded in thinking about mobilizing and organizing at the grassroots level when national-level associative life began breaking into smaller, territorial based organizational fragments. This context is crucial for tracking the contributions of this normative tendency.

For Latin America the 1930-1960s period of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) coupled with Corporatism included a distinctive pattern of nationally-organized associative life. National movements tended to come in one of two basic forms—national workers’ and peasant federations. In turn, these federations worked closely—in synchronized fashion in some settings—with nationally organized political parties. This created a situation of centralized corporatist accommodation. Peak actors from interest group held *de facto* monopolies over demands channeled up from the lower and intermediate levels (Schmitter, 1972, 1974; Malloy, 1977).

When the ISI-Corporatist model began breaking down, fraying at the center of national associations followed (Garretón, et al., 2004). When that center no longer held, a decoupling between national and local groups began. Importantly, this breakdown coincided with the start of hard economic times in the late 1970s, and then the collapse of social safety nets during the ‘lost’ economic decade of the 1980s (Panizza, 2009). Amid economic immiseration, local organizations turned their attention to highly pragmatic self-help goals: housing, economic co-operatives, and community health care assistance. Strikingly, the leitmotifs of activism shifted from grievances and demands to needs and cooperation.

This transition from class organization to associative life generated puzzlement. At first glance, it seemed the inclination to satisfy urgent economic needs had effectively de-politicized participation or converted it to some anodyne version. But in reality a process of recasting the terms of political action took place throughout Latin America. As Auyero argued regarding the context of Argentina's transition to neo-liberalism, practices associated with basic needs and community cooperation simply involved a re-situating of activism from the factory to the block (Auyero, 2001). The aforementioned notion of "territorialisation" is particularly relevant (Riveire d'Arc, 1999). This referred to the transfer of social processes and struggles from the shop floor or town hall to the shantytown or village. Thus, upon closer examination, the shift in leitmotifs of activism from grievances and demands to needs and cooperation reflected a shift underway in the terms of political struggle—a change in the nature of the "popular sector interest regime" (Collier and Handlin, 2009).

Thus, *basismo*'s first contribution is visible at the level of interpretive frameworks. It provided a particularly compelling explanation for interpreting local participation as intrinsically political, with political understood to mean the disclosing of previously unperceived possibilities. For example, *basismo* identified such activities as communal management of food and health care cooperatives as potentially radical political activities, if these can be defined as "multi-layered, well-informed, scaled political interventions" (Lehmann, 1992, 198). *Basismo* therefore helped redefine 'the political' by providing intellectual justification for the slogan, think globally, act locally.'

*Basismo*'s second contribution was to enrich understanding of the importance of policy mechanisms for local participation by recasting these as opportunities to rethink authority relations. An integral ingredient here was the reorientation of the Church, in particular, toward

popular culture. From the new standpoint, popular culture was rich in meanings and values and therefore eminently worthy of engaging and celebrating. Instead of ‘the popular’ calling forth “images of ignorance, magic, and superstition,” it came to be “identified in ordinary discourse with values like authenticity, sharing, solidarity, and sacrifice” (Levine, 1992, 7). This implied a major change in approach. The poor did not need purification; they needed a cooperative infrastructure to help them cultivate voice.

Along these lines, basismo instilled a different disposition toward the everyday manifestations of authority relations. *Basistas* exhibited a “bias or tendency” for approaching mobilization differently from that inspired by dominant frameworks in Latin American politics: “an unquestioning obeisance to the grassroots, to the poor, and all their works” and “*machismo*-Leninism,” a reference to the paternalistic hierarchy that regularly accompanied vanguard mobilization of the masses (Lehmann, 1990, 186). Instead, *basismo* is, in “praxis, just as in theory,” a “call to openness” premised on “refusing the closedness of both large-scale centralized political organization and large scale systems of teleological thinking” (Ibid). *Basismo* is an invocation to leaders and organizers. It calls for leaders to radically decenter their positioning by preaching listening as a practice for aiding efforts to strengthen popular voice (Lehmann, 1990, 186).

## II. The Venezuelan Left and Local Participation: *La Causa R and Civil Society*

From roughly 1960 to 1968 the *Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR) waged an armed struggle against the state institutions that represented Venezuela’s Punto Fijo democracy. The MIR included youth activists inspired by the 1959 Cuban Revolution and activists disillusioned with AD. As the rebellion met stiff opposition from security

forces, peace negotiations began. Most MIR fighters accepted the pacification proposals of COPEI's Rafael Caldera—1968-1972.

MIR's failure had devastating effects for the Venezuelan Left. Internecine conflict over the reasons for failure tore the Left apart into different factions. The Left's "slow and difficult" recovery to national prominence as a third or alternative party voice took twenty years (Ellner, 1988, 40). The Left's standard bearer, the 1947-founded PCV, suffered the most from guerrilla failure: It had supported MIR's rebellion, leading the Betancourt government to outlaw it (1959-1963). Crucially, PCV leadership failed to forge new ties with ex-MIR commanders. The party ceased to be a magnet for idealistic activists, and without vanguard status, it lost its ability to steer the Left.

Groups that either did not accept the pacification deals or remained radically opposed to Punto Fijo formed an urban underground.<sup>28</sup> Their belief in revolution implied a bias against any piecemeal changes, including direct popular participation in the existing system. With the hard left isolated in negotiations over reformulating a revolutionary struggle, civil society and new Left-wing groups stepped in and began to fill organizational spaces at the base level.

### *Civil Society: Channeling Basismo*

Two NGO groups played central roles in mobilizing at the base level: the Centro Gumilla, a Jesuit research and social action center, and CESAP (*Centra al Servicio de la Accion Popular*). These groups were organizational vestiges of student rebellions—one in 1969 and the other in 1971—against "luxury and ostentation in the church" (Levine, 1992, 87). They also drew

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<sup>28</sup> For an account of the urban underground see Ciccariello-Maher (2013). The survivors of the urban underground groups went on to supply chavismo with its most radical supporters: the armed collectives that policed historically ungoverned neighborhoods and served as shock troops at rallies, marches, and on election day.



inspiration from rebellions by COPEI's youth wing—the Astronauts—against the party's hierarchy (Ibid).

Gumilla published the periodical SIC, which had an editorial line roughly aligned with the Freire's ideas about consciousness building and with writings of proponents of Liberation Theology. For example, the periodical's editorials commonly argued that "the religion of the people is not a passive hiding place or refuge, but rather an arm of resistance and even of active defense" (Levine, 1992, 88). Gumilla had a office in the countryside, where efforts involved funding coffee cooperatives and helping found community groups. Likewise, it offered formal training to community organization leaders in skills such as accounting, as well as courses on more abstract issues such as human rights (Ibid).

Gumilla worked hand in hand with CESAP on many projects. But the latter is distinguished by its tendency to "direct[s] its energies less to starting groups than to responding to local requests for help and providing coordination" (Levine, 1992, 89). Still, CESAP had an agenda. In its pamphlets, "the stated goal of popular organization is described as replacing capitalism with a just, participatory, and classless society" while a more "immediate purpose is to promote class consciousness and egalitarian social relations in family and community" (Levine, Ibid).

### *La Causa R: Operationalizing Basismo*

In political society, two new party organizations explicitly made base-level mobilization the centerpiece of their platform. Ex-MIR leaders Teodoro Petkoff and Pompeyo Marquez founded the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS) in 1970. MAS followed a strategy of "boring within the system in order to undermine its cohesiveness" (Ellner, 1988, 42). By the mid-1970s, MAS became the country's third most powerful electoral force.

In 1971, Alfonso Manerio, a former mid-level MIR guerrilla leader turned professor and trade union activist, founded *La Causa Radical*—later renamed *La Causa R* (The Radical Cause, LCR). LCR fashioned its organization and political strategy in critical opposition to existing models for parties. The MAS, Manerio argued, carried on the Venezuelan PCV’s legacy of excessively bureaucratic party politics (Nogueira-Budny, 2013, 113-115). Beyond the critique of party structure, Manerio posited that it was self-defeating for the Left to play a system-oriented role since participation offered few strategic benefits. At this juncture, Manerio argued, the Left could not compete effectively in electoral politics. Manerio believed that conditions skewed to favor AD and COPEI rendered the electoral path to power useless, even if it was early to arrive at this judgment.

LCR concentrated on incremental mobilization, working to “patiently build a base and raise concrete issues” (Ellner, 1988, 161). LCR focused its recruitment on three arenas: university politics, where it recruited students and faculty; workers in Venezuela’s industrializing city of Guayana, where it concentrated on steel and iron workers; and popular sectors in the sprawling parish of Sucre in Libertador, where it concentrated on establishing a presence among the indigent in far flung barrios (Lopez Maya, 1997).<sup>29</sup>

LCR began by projecting an image of itself. First, the LCR eschewed self-identification as a party. The LCR sought to create a party “externally mobilized” from civil society (Nogueira-Budny, 2014, 114). Manerio’s words captures this fixation on creating an “anti-party attitude”

Far from starting with a pre-established party structure and working on behalf of it and its interests, we are confident that the movement of masses can take in its hands the task of producing within its own fold a new leadership (Manerio, 1971, quoted in Ellner, 1988, 160).

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<sup>29</sup> Sectors not directly associated with the Left also condemned Punto Fijo for being dangerously dependent on elite representation. For example, youth wings of both AD and COPEI made their concerns about hierarchy known and raised their voices in favor of direct popular participation (Lopez Maya, 2015).

The idea of LCR as a venue—a “movement of movements”—symbolized the party’s embrace of politics as process and its idealized notion of oneness between organizer and activist (Lopez Maya, 1997, 127). The goal for LCR became forming a vanguard but maintaining it under “permanent construction” (Nogueira-Budny, 2014, 114). This identity resonated with intellectuals and Left-wing actors gripped by the notion of joining a “new type of party, one whose political stance, strategy, and composition were not to be determined by unchanging orthodox ideologies and status-quo-biased party bureaucracies, but rather defined and continually refined by popular movements” (Ibid).

To some extent, LCR backed up the rhetoric. In fact, Nogueira-Budny argues, the party became the victim of its own success. It promoted too much internal democracy and fostered an excessively loose, un-ceremonial environment characterized by unwritten rules and flexible membership rules. The fluid organizational structure came back to haunt the party when leadership struggles emerged and the manifestly weak organizational coherence could not hold the structure together amid infighting (Nogueira-Budny, 2014, 123-131).

I examine the features of this highly fluid organizational structure to trace how LCR’s practice channeled basismo elements. For example, to try and fulfill this promise of organically cultivated leaderships, Maneiro called for LCR leaders to immerse themselves in popular culture. Maneiro preached ‘listening to the people’ to ‘learn about their needs.’ Such ‘listening’ involved fanning out to shantytowns to directly observe and take in the “dynamism” of popular sectors’ “local knowledge” as seen in the customs of neighborhood groups, the rules of informal sports leagues, and everyday cultural idioms (Lopez Maya, 1997, 122-123).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> To carry out this work in Caracas, LCR employed ‘*Pro-Catia*’—an NGO led by activists sympathetic to the party working from working class and barrio neighborhoods in Catia.

To give concrete form to LCR's 'movement identity,' the organization promoted 'new trade unionism.' Roughly, this meant workers acquiring a voice in union decision-making. Outside of the participatory spirit implicit in 'new trade unionism,' this approach to 'worker power' sparked interest for more practical reasons. LCR affiliates fighting corruption represented the hope of injecting new blood to revitalize union politics. In the industrial city of Guayana, where LCR first made positive inroads at the state owned steel company SIDOR, LCR leaders argued "the parties have always governed" (the unions) and now "it's time for the workers" (Andrés Velásquez, quoted in Ellner, 1988, 160). After nearly a decade of fighting for worker activists to become leaders at the SIDOR unions, the LCR's '*El matancero*' slate of candidates triumphed in 1979. Seven candidates won seats on the union's executive committee (Lopez Maya, 1997, 125).<sup>31</sup>

The LCR's achievements in mobilizing radical trade union activists and promoting them to leadership positions within SIDOR implied a loss for other Left-wing parties, in particular AD. LCR had made successful incursions into a 'Punto Fijo' institution, the *Confederación Venezolano de Trabajadores* (Venezuelan Confederation of Workers, CTV). The CTV served as Punto Fijo's corporatist union structure for skilled labor. This meant that, at least in part, it operated as a vessel for party interests, particularly those of AD. LCR's successes in Guayana were noticed. The party moved onto the radar screens of AD and COPEI.

LCR's gains in Guayana were modest. Still, their advances implied the usefulness of targeted, incremental mobilization and promoting the "democratization of all aspects of social life" (Lopez Maya, 1997, 139). Then, as LCR began amassing local power, Maneiro died in 1982.

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<sup>31</sup> Originally, *El Matancero* served as the title of the underground newspaper published by Pablo Medina, a worker-activist affiliated with LCR and who had strong ties to Caracas-based intellectuals (Lopez Maya, 1997, 124).

Before passing away, Maneiro had orchestrated an important organizational pivot. He steered LCR toward working within the system to disrupt it.

### *LCR's Pivot Toward the System and Decentralization*

Two major developments shaped Maneiro's pivot toward electoral politics. First, the 1973-1977 oil boom changed Maneiro's thinking. During the boom ordinary Venezuelans received increased social assistance from an elected government. LCR's posture of abstention kept the party out of touch with a population oriented toward the system (Maneiro, 1986, *Notas Políticas*). In the late 1970s, the "typical ordinary Venezuelan" was an urbanized adult with access to some formal education, some financial savings, and experience interacting with state institutions. Such ordinary citizens experienced democracy through incorporation into government social programs as much as through voting (Coronil, 1997). The Pérez government distributed benefits at higher levels when oil rents increased during the booms. In 1980, Venezuelans enjoyed the highest per capita income in Latin America—\$4,410 (Grindle, 2000, 42).

Oil wealth may have been illusory but, politically, its effects on popular attitudes could not be ignored by parties seeking to gain footholds on power. Maneiro argued the Left faced a crisis to survive. To avoid irrelevance, Maneiro called for the Left to accept the political culture habits reproduced by the "oil-based social contract" of Punto Fijo (Karl, 1997, 57-58). LCR's pivot toward the system indicated an effort to realign the organization with ordinary Venezuelans' habits and expectations.

Second, a strategic opportunity developed. The pivot coincided with incipient discussion of decentralization. In 1984, the AD government of Jaime Lusinchi established 'The Presidential Commission for the Reform of the State' (COPRE). This body served as the formal expression of

the political elite's attempt to crack open a small 'political *apertura*' (political opening). COPRE generated low expectations. "Lusinchi," said one commission member, "created COPRE in order to do nothing" (Grindle, 2000, 54).

Commission members had their own ideas. They crafted a strategy to make their work relevant. For example, to help give proposals a degree of impartiality, and create the impression reforms would survive a change in government, COPRE's architects, in particular Carlos Blanco, deliberately described the Commission as "state" policy (Grindle, 2000, 57). COPRE's first phase involved listening to and consulting with academia, the church, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), business and labor (Gómez Calcaño and Lopez Maya, 1989). Meanwhile, in its spirit COPRE resonated with demands made by newly vibrant neighborhood associations, NGOs, and prominent members of the press. Working on their own tracks, grassroots groups provided societal expressions that seemed to capture the spirit of decentralization (Hellinger, 1991, 155-188). The reinforcing top-down and bottom-up calls for reform accelerated momentum for decentralization. Still, the approval of decentralization reform required the consent of AD and COPEI. By the late 1980s party leaders accepted that "urgent measures were necessary to re-launch Venezuela's democracy" (González and Mascareño, 2004, 188).

Though decentralization failed to re-legitimize Punto Fijo, the enacted reforms produced important changes. In 1989 two key laws came into operation. First, an electoral law reformed the process for selecting mayors and governors by introducing direct, uninominal elections for these posts. Second, an administrative reform accomplished its objectives. It transferred policy responsibilities, mostly pertaining to basic services and utilities, to these sub-national levels, and it strengthened sub-national governments' financial capacity to execute them.

Compared with similar reforms undertaken, for example, in Colombia, the laws proposed “noncontroversial” changes (Grindle, 2000, 38). But in Venezuela, where a history of centralized administration controlled by the two party system had created a highly closed political system, they really meant something. These laws gave substance to the 1961 Constitution’s principles of ‘federalism’ and democratic accountability. Any changes that made political action accessible to ordinary citizens introduced new possibilities. For example, through 1989, parties appointed governors and mayors. Consequently, these officials “had little to do other than perform political functions in the service of the highly centralized clientele system because the same system had, over the years, systematically assumed power over public works and service provision” (Grindle, 2000, 38).

The holding of direct elections, combined with the introduction of uninominal election rules that put candidates’ names on the ballots, effectively cast light on the previously opaque process of selecting local officials. Moreover, elected officials now had administrative responsibilities, which, theoretically, they could not turn over to the central government. Since voters could now “identify the people and the parties responsible for political decision making and the parties responsible for decision making and the management of public affairs” (Grindle, 2000, 92) parties had to discuss governmental performance in public. This opened spaces for societal groups to make claims for accountability. Last, with regional elections and sub-national governance becoming more transparent, the Left’s inclination to participate increased.

### *Progress Stalled: LCR’s Rise and Chávez’s Emergence*

In the 1988 Parliamentary elections three LCR candidates won elections to become federal deputies (lower house of Congress). Then, the second Pérez government (1989-1993) badly

mishandled a social convulsion—the *Caracazo* rioting that ‘shook Caracas.’ Riots breaking out over the effects of government-imposed economic austerity on the prices of basic goods and services hit Venezuela’s major cities on February 27, 1989. The Pérez government, surprised by the protests, reacted with a heavy hand. Roughly 1000 perished, with barrio residents suffering the brunt of repression (Coronil and Skurski, 2006). Nine months later, in December 1989, Venezuela held its first elections for mayors and governors.

The beginning of decentralization constituted a pivotal development for the future of two-party rule. Changes began at the municipal level. From 1960 to 1980 AD and COPEI used district councils, party-appointed structures that governed over multiple municipalities without citizen input channels. In this way parties fashioned state and municipal administration into a decentralized patronage state; local government primarily existed to “reward supporters” of AD and COPEI (Nickson, 1995, 260). The patronage state situation began to change with the 1978 and 1989 revisions to the Municipal code. The second revision had three key components. It created a vehicle for parish representation through the *juntas parroquiales* (parish councils)—the lowest level of government. In urban areas, each junta had five councilors. Additionally, the revision to the Municipal Code called for Municipal councils to open government to the people by holding ‘town hall’ meetings called *cabildes abiertos* (Nickson, 1995, 267). Last, the law created new authorities for increasing local-level taxation. But, municipalities still depended heavily on fiscal transfers from the national budget and local government remained woefully under-capacitated to fulfill the new responsibilities assigned to it by the 1989 municipal code (Ibid).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> On a list of eighteen functions to be carried out through central and local government coordination, the Municipal Code classed “gas, electricity, water supply and urban transportation” as “municipal competencies” (Nickson, 1995, 263).



LCR could not take credit for emergence of a local level institutional context but it could take advantage of it. For example, through LCR was not a guardian of Punto Fijo, its criticism of the system seemed aligned with these reforms that intended to inject competition and political vibrancy into the local arena. As a result, when LCR participated in the system, its candidates tended to cut the profile of genuine ‘system alternatives’—that is, compared with the rest of the field. First, the party’s candidate for the governorship of Bolívar, the former steel worker turned labor leader Andres Velásquez, won the 1989 governor's race. Then, three LCR mayoral candidates won office in the 1992 elections. LCR achieved its most important municipal victory in Libertador, Caracas— the country’s capital and home to most federal government buildings, including the Presidential palace.

Aristúbulo Isturiz, a pugnacious labor organizer, won Libertador for LCR. His election race came down to the wire. This created anxiety among supporters since LCR was “widely acknowledged” to have been the victim of fraud during races in the 1989 mayoral and gubernatorial elections (Nogueira-Budny, 2014, 127). LCR supporters demonstrated outside the tribunal to pressure the authorities (Lopez Maya, 1997, 135). When the tribunal announced Isturiz’s victory, LCR celebrated the system’s conferring of legitimacy on the party.

The rise of LCR seemed likely to continue during the 1993 Presidential elections (Crisp and Levine, 1998). The vote took place in a context of problems at the bottom—growing disillusionment with Punto Fijo—and at the top—increasingly visible fissures within party leadership cliques. Falling short of victory—albeit amid renewed cries of fraud—LCR’s Velásquez won 22% of the vote. This vote share placed him in a virtual tie with second and third place candidates from AD and COPEI, respectively. Rafael Caldera, the founder of COPEI, and an original architect of Punto Fijo, won on his personalist party *Convergencia* with 60% turnout—

the lowest rate of participation since elections began during Punto Fijo (1959-) (Molina, 2004, 158). In the Congressional elections, LCR candidates won 40 seats in the lower house and 9 seats in the Senate (Ibid).

After these successes, LCR's progress came to a grinding halt. Problems started at the top. Leadership divided over whether to throw party support behind Hugo Chávez, who made clear his Presidential ambitions after receiving a pardon in 1994. The disagreement split the party into two groups: the more reform-minded LCR and the more radical, pro-Chávez *Patria Para Todos* (PPT).<sup>33</sup> With Chávez drawing LCR activists to his camp, the party faced a highly uncertain future.

### III. *Al Poder (To Power)! LCR and Basismo in Practice*

The LCR Capital City governing experience in Libertador created excitement on the Left about building local-level participatory democracy. Realistically, the likelihood of achieving this lofty goal was low. LCR remained defined by its informal organizational culture and lack of governing experience.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, municipal government remained highly underdeveloped in terms of its transparency, accessibility, and the overall quality of administration. Consequently, the relevance of Mayor Isturiz's effort to turn "the city's inhabitants into active citizens" and bring "urban services to the barrios" (Goldfrank, 2010a, 85) needs to be analyzed in terms of

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<sup>33</sup> Nogueira-Budny notes the important caveat that LCR's 'diffuse leadership' opened the party to a wide range of views about democracy and of how to bring democratization about. Thus, as LCR began to participate in elections, the party remained divided between groups using the electoral route to power and those "trying to take it down" (Nogueira-Budny, 2014, 119).

<sup>34</sup> Moreover, its leaders were not polished politicians. For example, Isturiz came to LCR with a diverse background as a former University Professor and as an activist in the highly competitive and aggressive world of union politics. The combative world of union politics formatively shaped Isturiz. At a polite gathering of academics, public utility company administrators and other politicians for a discussion of public policy, Isturiz boasted he took pleasure from heated contestation: "I was born fighting and if I do not fight, I will die, for me it [fighting] is very enjoyable" (Isturiz, 1996, 144).

policymakers incorporating basismo into their frameworks, the development of LCR as a political party, the lessons learned by the practitioners, and its non-trivial impacts in some barrios.

### *Living with a Paradox: Participation and State Power*

The example of LCR's Capital City governing experiences provides insights into basismo's relationship to state power (Lehmann, 1990, 204). Lehmann describes "distrust of large-scale formal bureaucracies" as a central tenet of basismo (Lehmann, 1990, 195). However, this distrust of "large-scale formal bureaucracies" did not stem from an ideological rejection of institutions. It instead stemmed from interactions with the corrupt elements and various weaknesses of Latin American states. Thus, on the one hand, some segments of basismo conflated this order with the state and concluded it hopeless to work through the state. On the other hand, some opposed the established political order and criticized the state as constructed.

By 1992, LCR was much more open to working within the system. Moreover, as it gained experience with administering state power, the party began to accept the "paradox" of an "abiding but necessary conflict between community and bureaucracy" (Lehmann, 1990, 196). Acknowledging the possibilities of "creative tensions" between participation and the state helped the party overcome "disdain for institutions" (Lehmann, 1990, 204). Thus, LCR was starting from scratch in terms of its governing experience and in terms of carving out an approach to governing that aligned with its principles and platform.

At the heart of the party's policy efforts lay its signature initiative, 'Governing from the Parish.' A pamphlet described 'Governing from the Parish Government' as "nothing more than the bringing together of the Municipal Government and the People" (Goldfrank, 2011a, 86).

Efforts to create instances of so-called parish government followed an experimental approach of flexibly implementing policies.

### *LCR's Governing from the Parish*

After taking office, Isturiz embarked on a listening tour. He held *cabilde abiertos* (open air assemblies) in nineteen parishes. At the forums, which LCR held in schoolhouses or community centers located at accessible parish places, Isturiz “set forth his government plan” (Arconada, “*Ordenanza Municipal de Los Gobiernos Parroquiales*,” SIC No. 578, September-October 1995, 347). Attendance at the forums exceeded LCR’s expectations for turnout. It also exceeded the new government’s capacity to respond. In some cases, rooms overflowed with impatient residents who submitted “enormous lists of demands of a wildly diverse nature” (Goldfrank, 2011a, 85).

This was the case in January 1993 when Isturiz held the first open-air assembly in Antimano parish, a western outer-borough on the outskirts of Libertador (Arconada, 1996). Neighborhood life in the steep, labyrinthine barrios of Antimano provides a snapshot of the country’s worst social ills. Approximately 70% of Antimano residents lived below the poverty line, with a large portion suffering from extreme poverty. Despite having an estimated population of between 117,000 and 250,000, twenty police patrolled the parish’s eighty barrios, all of which faced major problems with violent crime (Goldfrank, 2011a, 113). Moreover, population growth due to land squatting combined with sub-optimal public services situation created an increasingly chaotic situation (Ibid). Approximately 52% of households lacked consistent access to basic services (water, sewage, and sanitation) (Ibid).

Antimano’s problems with water service was typical of service deficits in densely populated barrios. Moreover, when new residents illegally tapped into already fragile pipelines,

this weakened the pressure with which water was pumped. On an intermittent basis, disputes broke out between neighbors who grew agitated as the length between service delivery grew—from receiving fresh water supply on a cycle of every fifteen days to receiving water service once every thirty days. Hidrocapital President Jose María de Viana recognized this hardship, describing his 1992-1995 tenure as marked by managing “a citizens’ insurgency” about potable water services (De Viana, May 10, 2014).

At the open-air public meeting in Antimano, Isturiz encountered an emotional crowd and a tense environment stoked by a subtext of intense partisan competition. AD surrogates tucked themselves into the crowd, presenting themselves as individual neighborhood dwellers, though disruption was their express purpose. This was symptomatic of what Goldfrank describes as AD’s three year’s war to undermine the LCR administration (Goldfrank, 2011a, 92-97).

Isturiz personally presided over the forum. He proposed a governance procedure meant to bring city officials and ordinary inhabitants together in spaces easily accessible to the latter. Isturiz named this ‘Governing from the Parish,’ a process to consist of meeting forums featuring three integrated administrative layers—the elected parish councilpersons (*La Junta Parroquial*), technicians and social workers working for the administration’s different commissions, and a citizens’ board composed of volunteering parish residents (Arconada, 1995). Although the proposal for ‘Governing from Parish’ won popular approval, those looking for urgent action on water were not satisfied.

With residents reporting that the time between service delivery fluctuated between forty-five and sixty days, Isturiz proposed the creation of a ‘Water Cabinet.’ This cabinet would be installed as a subunit of the Parish Government. It would feature the same arrangement of private citizens, elected representatives from the Junta Parroquial, technicians and social workers working

for the administration's different commissions, and a citizens' board composed of volunteering parish residents. But water lay outside the jurisdiction of Municipal administration. Isturiz's Public Service and Public Works Commissions could not singlehandedly accomplish service provision. It needed the assistance of Hidrocapital, the state-owned Capital region water utility housed within the Ministry of the Environment, to expand water service provision. Hidrocapital was not an official part of the parish government. Nevertheless, Isturiz proceeded according to the plan he announced. He proposed expanding the Water Cabinet to encompass representatives from Hidrocapital. As Isturiz's administration set up 'Governing from the Parish' forums throughout Libertador's nineteen parishes it created parallel technical committees.

### *Fragments of Deepened Governance*

LCR officials thought this two-level format of holding parish-wide and thematic-based forums could provide the scaffolding for "an agile, effective, and bottom-up participation program" (Goldfrank, 2011a, 98). It did not. Judged in terms of redistributing opportunities for participation from party officials and government technicians to ordinary citizens, opening discussions on topics residents prioritized, and generating decision-making power over budget investments, 'Governing from the Parish' failed. Goldfrank found that because "Caraqueños [Caracas residents] did not see a direct link between their involvement in parish government meetings and benefits for themselves or their communities," the initial wave of "participation dissipated" (Ibid, 98). Caraqueños as a whole may not have perceived a direct link. But in two neighborhoods the initiative made palpable impact.

In the Antimano and La Pastora parishes 'Governing from the Parish' enlivened state-society interaction, creating fragments of a deepened governance model. For Antimano-based

activist Santiago Arconada, “the construction of a space for information that stimulates the capacities for the people, the state, and local councilmen to oversee and control” public works projects represented the highest order outcome of the parish-wide and technical issue-based forums sponsored by Governing from the Parish (Arconada, 1995, 347). Arconada called on municipal government to craft a “Master Plan for Parish Urban Development,” a municipal urban plan tailored for parish needs. That Plan, he said, symbolized “a notion of the future without which it is not possible to confront the chaos we currently suffer from, and whose permanent discussion will help produce a consensus as to each parish’s priorities” (Arconada, 1995, 348). Two experiences shaped Arconada’s optimistic vision: the Water Cabinet meetings in Antimano, and the Community Grants Program in Catuche, an alternative program developed to fill a gap left by a failed effort to establish participatory budgeting.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Fragment One: Antimano*

The first Water Cabinet for Antimano met one week after Isturiz introduced the ‘Governing from the Parish’ in Antimano. The soon-to-be working group members met on a Wednesday. Subsequently, the Water Cabinet involved meetings between officials from the Mayor’s Public Service Commission, officials from Hidrocapital, and concerned volunteers from the community. Residents who regularly attended the forums, which ranged in size from 35 to 120 participants (Goldfrank, 2011a, 114), reportedly referred to meetings as “*el gobierno de los miercoles*” (the Wednesday government) (Arconada, 2005).

Water service improved thanks in part to discussions held at the Water Cabinet Meetings. Citizens participating in the Antimano Water Cabinet directly petitioned Hidrocapital to repair the

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<sup>35</sup> One significant example of autonomous participation developed in Macarao parish through the parish-wide organization Macarao y Su Gente. For more on the Macarao story see, Grohmann (1996).

Canaima Water Tank and to fix a leaky water main from which sewage seeped out onto the streets. This repair greatly enhanced the quality of service in the Antimano and Junquito parishes in terms of increasing the frequency of water service delivery (Arconada, 1996). Distribution improved with water pumped once every two weeks instead of once every two months (Goldfrank, 2011, 114). Also, resulting from the discussions held at the Water Cabinet, the utility installed a water pipeline that formally connected Antimano with the industrial district La Yaguara. All of these changes improved the quality of water services in Antimano.

In Antimano, the personal interest of the President of Hidrocapital, Jose Maria de Viana, made an important difference. De Viana grew up in Antimano and had studied at the *Universidad Catolica Andres Bello* (Catholic University of Andres Bello, UCAB), which is located at the foot of Antimano's hillside barrios. He closely followed proceedings in Antimano, attending many of the Wednesday meetings (Goldfrank, 2011a, 116).

The installation of the water pipeline that connected Antimano barrios with La Yaguara included a recursive process of regularized citizen-state interaction. For the pipeline project, Hidrocapital requested citizen information inputs in the form of block-by-block water users' censuses. These handwritten censuses gave the utility what it lacked: awareness of the size of population it would be servicing and those that would be affected during the interruption in service during the installation. To report back to Hidrocapital in an organized manner, residents assembled Mesas Técnica de Agua (Water Committees) to compile data for the informal water censuses about residents' water usage rates and distribution rates on a block-by-block basis. Meanwhile, as construction created disruptions to existing networks, the Mesas Técnicas de Agua coordinated



with the Municipal Public Service Commission and Hidrocapital to organize the distribution of water from state-supplied water trucks (Goldfrank, 2011a, 114).<sup>36</sup>

### *Fragment Two: Catuche*

As Governing from the Parish developed a following at the parish level, the Isturiz administration experimented with new programs. Isturiz began using the Parish Government's forums to publicize a Community Grants program. The program proposed distributing grants to community-based civil society groups in shantytowns.

In La Pastora parish the Social Consortium of Catuche impressed municipal officials with its organization. The Consortium was a self-mobilized, diverse group promoting urban redevelopment in a shantytown built along the Catuche creek that swelled to a river during the rainy season (Giménez, World Bank, June, 1997). The Consortium included prominent figures in Caracas social networks for urban architecture, church social service, and community activism (Interview #14).<sup>37</sup> The nucleus of the Consortium came from a Catuche-based civil society association. Previous outreach efforts by foundation *Fe y Algeria* and the *Centro Gumilla* helped bring the civil society association into existence (Giménez, World Bank, June, 1997).

The incipient Community Grants program granted the Catuche Consortium its startup funds. These funds went toward a micro-enterprise that oversaw river renewal. The community-based company cleaned the creek to help the water flow, decrease the smell from sewage and trash residue, and prevent surges in water level that risked flooding. The creek renewal produced a sense

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<sup>36</sup> On the heels of these successes, transportation and cultural cabinets began holding meetings to address the deteriorating road situation and foment community theater and recreation programs, respectively.

<sup>37</sup> Among the urban architects were university professors Federico Villanueva and Josefina Baldó, who were also left wing intellectuals that joined LCR's splinter group PPT. Among the Jesuits was Father Jose Virtuoso, who became Centro Gumilla's director (Interview #14).

of community revitalization. Shantytown residents began to think of themselves as *Catuchenos* (residents of Catuche), and this identification in turn encouraged them to imagine future urban redevelopment programs (Interview #60). The United Nations Habitat Program recognized the Catuche Consortium as one of the ‘hundred best practices’ of self-promoted urban development at its annual meeting in 1996.<sup>38</sup> In a way, the U.N. award celebrated the successful implementation of *basismo*.

### *A New Perspective on Participation*

For the LCR, the Governing from the Parish experience drove home two related points. First, ‘Governing from the Parish’ stimulated reflection about the range of activities participating with the state could involve. In both Antimano and Catuche, programs stimulated civic interest in self-directed residential efforts to ‘Plan with City Hall.’ In this way, Governing from the Parish held out the promise of state-society interaction defined not by partisan vote mobilization or clientelistic favor seeking but by voluntary collective actions that could contribute to local government becoming more sophisticated in administrative affairs (Arconada, 1995, 348). Second, by de-centering state-society interactions, ‘Governing from the Parish’ raised the prospect of increasingly dense state-society relations in neighborhood spaces. This was significant since it helped LCR realize that it not only had the goal of promoting mobilization but that, as the party in charge of a governmental institutions, it had an interest in cultivating societal spaces where public officials would be welcome. In other words, being in power helped LCR change its understanding of the value of local participation.

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<sup>38</sup> Additionally, word spread beyond Catuche to nearby Anauco shantytown, where initial efforts to form self-help associations based on the Consortium model began (Interview #40).

Arconada described ‘Governing from the Parish’ as generating a sliver of hope for the idea of a “city of residents transformed into citizens through their sharing of information with institutions and their active participation in decision-making” (Arconada, 1995, 348). These hopes were put on hold. AD’s Antonio Ledezma unseated Isturiz in the 1995 election. Afterwards, the AD government discontinued a LCR Municipal Ordinance that attempted to institutionalize ‘Governing from the Parish.’

### Conclusions: A Basista Cell in the State and Chavismo’s Institutional Origins

The approach followed here traced basismo as an important normative tendency on the Venezuelan left and as a framework that shaped political mobilization under chavismo. The chapter described basismo’s contributions at three levels: configuring interpretative frameworks to define local participation as political and rethink the authority relations between organizer and participant; shaping groups organizational structures so they could effectively follow these principles; and enlightening the LCR municipal administration’s thinking about the creative tensions of the state promoting participation through policies—like ‘Governing from the Parish’—that presupposed greater state presence in the barrios and sought to generate societal attitudes favorably disposed to working with the state.

These contributions of basismo arguably amounted to something larger and more influential when a substantial portion of leftists influenced by basismo joined the government, constituting a cell of basismo within the state. As I discuss in Chapter 3, networks of people working on water service and urban development grew out of Governing from the Parish’s Antimano and Catuche experiences. These networks served as an important basis for preparing draft policy plans for the Chávez team on the issues of water service and urban development. The

members of these networks worked on the Chávez campaign and then accepted appointments to high-ranking positions in the Caracas Water Utility Hidrocapital and at the National Housing and Urban Development Agency CONAVI. Isturiz served as Vice-President of the National Constituent Assembly that drafted Chávez's new Constitution, playing an important role in writing articles that pertained to the local level, and then became Education and Sports Minister in the first Chávez government.

More broadly, these networks illustrated the entanglement of top-down and bottom-up elements within chavismo. In this respect, a rather interesting paradox suggested by the idea that politics makes strange bedfellows came into sharp relief. Basismo, a normative tendency prioritizing a style of political mobilization based on listening to and believing in the poor, and that gained its most fervent support from actors skeptical of "large-scale, formal bureaucracies" (Lehmann, 1990, 195), moved from the heart of the popular movement to the rationalized administrative apparatus of the state. Thus, trends within the state became the key to tracking political mobilization's evolution under chavismo.

The insight that Chávez's rise occasioned a shift from the streets to the state may seem obvious. But scholarship on chavismo has for the most not unpacked the implications of chavismo's Leftwing support groups having roots in the streets and experience in decentralized governance. Some students of Chavismo's origins describe its emergence as part of a Bolivarian movement—a weakly integrated group that included underground movements (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013), radical social movements (Fernandes, 2010), and disgruntled military officials (Lopez Maya, 2003). In this sense, 'Bolivarian' serves as an umbrella term for all the radical forces opposed to the Punto Fijo system, and provides a broad framework for capturing the cultural,

economic, and socio-political formations related to Chavismo's nationalist project (Smilde and Hellinger, 2011).

The main limitation of the Bolivarian lens is that it does not distinguish the different institutional settings in which these formations related to chavismo as a governing political movement. Such distinctions are crucial for specifying the mechanisms that link past with present. Fernandes argue that chavismo is the consequence of street-based developments involving urban popular democracy (Fernandes, 2010). In the same vein, Ciccariello-Maher argues these street and neighborhood level interactions hold the potential of a “dual power that exists in ongoing, tense, and antagonistic opposition to the state, straining insistently upwardly from the bases to generate a dialectical motion allowing the revolutionary transformation of the state and its institutions” (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013, 19). By comparison, Lopez Maya argues that Chávez's stubborn opposition to representative institutions is precisely what prevented the political movement from mediating state-society relations in a more democratic fashion (Lopez Maya, 2003, 90). Ellner and Hellinger describe chavismo's top-down and bottom-up elements in terms of authoritarian and democratic currents that stem from military and left-wing groups, respectively (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003, 220-221). They go on to argue that contradictions between left and right became manifest when these groups contested each other for state power during Chávez's tenure.

The accounts from Lopez Maya and Ellner and Hellinger imply that institutional dimensions are relevant but they do not specify linkages. This account sought to make explicit the ways in which chavismo's origins as a political movement initially not only supported by military interests but also by Left wing groups relates to the emerging centrality of a local government agenda in the 1990s. Decentralization is the key. Decentralization reforms provided a formal institutional ground where basismo and the Left could interact while the collapse of the historical

parties AD and COPEI opened spaces for LCR to gain a foothold on power and for fruitful interactions between ideas and party organization. In short, decentralization helped make it possible for LCR militants to envision their ideas as state programs, thereby edging them a step closer to Chávez's vision of top-down reform and drawing together these strange bedfellows.

“It may well be that wildflowers grow by themselves. But grassroots organizations do not. They are cultivated, in large measure, by just policies and competent agencies that do their job”

Sheldon Annis, 1987, 133

“When we try to empower the people *we do not dream that magic happens*. In our communities there have always been leaders but they understand their potential lies with being united, organized, and acting for the collective interests”

Jacqueline Faria, President of Hidrocapital, *Vertientes*, December 2004, 3, my emphasis

### Chapter 3: Hidrocapital’s Community Water Management: State Presence, Symbolic Recognition, and Intermediation (1999-2004)

On December 15, 1999 Venezuela experienced two pivotal events. One, 72% of voters approved a Constitutional reform in a national referendum. This outcome awarded President Chávez a key victory for installing his political project of nationalistic redemption and strengthened executive power. The new Constitution even renamed the country the ‘Bolivarian’ Republic of Venezuela—an homage to the Latin American independence hero Simon Bolívar whose legacy Chávez appropriated. It also expanded Presidential power, allowing Presidents to serve consecutive six-year terms—previously, Presidents served non-consecutive five year-terms.

Two, on the same day, thousands of shantytown (*barrio*) residents lost their homes amid deadly mudslides. The mudslides, which earned the title ‘*La Tragedia*’ (The Tragedy), presented Chávez with his first crisis. A headline from the Caracas daily *El Nacional* read “we’ll never know how many victims the tragedy claimed” (LAWR, December 21, 1999, WR-99-50). The headline captured a collective sense of powerlessness. Neither state nor society could mount an adequate response. Venezuelans would never learn how many victims the tragedy claimed because the state lacked the basic administrative capabilities to account for the populations affected. For example, the state lacked census data to accurately assess the loss of human life and it did not have a land survey for coordinating relief efforts based on a cadastral map. The contrast between

Constitutional reform and humanitarian crisis illustrated the stark differences between revamping the political system and addressing societal challenges.

Thus, the two events on December 15, 1999 brought into relief both the immediate impact Chávez had in creating a new institutional architecture and the challenges ahead. What efforts did Chávez undertake to close the gap between formal institutional change and institutional capabilities? What policy efforts shaped popular expectations about the impacts of institutional change on daily life? What programs drove home the meanings of the government's platform?

### *Linking Top and Bottom*

The Chávez government set in motion two processes for linking institutional reform with improved state capabilities at the bottom. First, Chávez 'civilianized' the military, enlisting military institutions in the direct delivery of social assistance to barrio-based populations (Norden, 2003). This civilianization politicized the military. Specifically, it strengthened a trend of adding policy responsibilities to the military's mission, a development that paved the way for the armed forces to become a key source of political support for Chávez (Trinkunas, 2004).

Second, civilian institutions led by Chávez appointees, some of them from the military, made significant reforms of their own. A case in point is Hidrocapital, the state-owned water utility. Hidrocapital's main responsibility is the provision of water services to approximately five-million residents in the Capital region's three states—The Federal District of Caracas, Miranda, and Vargas.<sup>39</sup> To lead the water utility Chávez appointed water engineers who had significant

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<sup>39</sup> The Federal District elects a Metropolitan Mayor. This Mayor's stature is roughly equal to that of a state governor.



professional experience at Hidrocapital but had been fired in the mid-1990s after they explicitly voiced their support for Chávez's Presidential ambitions while on the job.

These appointees were Left-wing militants and members of *Patria Para Todos* (Fatherland for All, PPT). The PPT, a pro-Chávez splinter group of *La Causa R* (The Radical Cause, LCR), promoted participatory governance as a centerpiece of its platform. At Hidrocapital, these *PPTistas* designed a policy for generating participatory governance in the Caracas water sector. In fact, though, their policy programs produced an empirically related but analytically distinct outcome. "*La Gestión Comunitario del Agua*" (Community Water Management, GCA) generated state-society intermediation in some base-level arenas of the Caracas water sector.

### *Intermediation as Process*

By intermediation I refer to a process, not venues. Intermediation captures the interactive properties of spaces and groups situated at the interstices of state and society. In other words, program-created spaces and groups are the concrete basis of a larger relational process understood as intermediation—the linking and locking into place of state-society relationships that open channels for groups to express preferences by transmitting demands up the chain and for institutions to shape preference formation down the chain through proposing problem-solving solutions (Schmitter, 1994, 2001). Intermediation does not imply democratic inclusion. But, it opens this possibility by laying the groundwork for the emergence of state presence and for interactions that aim to generate symbolic recognition of barrio-based residents' participation.

### *Community Water Management: Routines, State Presence, and Recognition*

At Hidrocapital intermediation revolved around the aforementioned *Gestión Comunitario del Agua* (GCA, Community Water Management), a policy launched in 1999. GCA entailed two programs—the *Consejo Comunitario de Agua* (Community Water Councils, CCAs) public forums on water, and the *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Committees, MTAs) community water groups. Illustrating the sequence surrounding implementation of these GCA programs helps capture why they contributed to intermediation in the Caracas water sector.

The following account of policy's sequence highlights the importance of understanding the balance between policy promotion and policy's substantive contents. Policy promotion, as much as policy's formal contents, contributed to the outcome of implementation with intermediation. To understand policy promotion we have to examine the professional routines of policy spokespersons and frontline state officials, both of which were directly involved in promoting policy reforms. This helps identify both the general pattern of Hidrocapital officials' routine and the specific ways in which senior policy spokespersons at the top and frontline officials at the bottom molded their routines in light of specific objectives. This provides insights for establishing clear links between routine and program implementation.<sup>40</sup>

Hidrocapital officials' professional routines included two main parts: community outreach and street-based dissemination of policy programs. The routines helped to further the utility's two strategic objectives: generating greater awareness of the CCA and MTA policy programs and cultivating support for these programs in the form of mobilizing participation in them.

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<sup>40</sup> Frontline worker is a category for public sector officials Tendler identified as central to the puzzle of policy implementation in Ceara, Brazil and more broadly (Tendler, 1997, pp. 76).

The routine's first part entailed community outreach. Community outreach sought to establish ground for more reliable lines of communication between state and society and thereby overcome the skepticism of the state that made it difficult to install Hidrocapital programs. I conceptualize community outreach in terms of postures adopted by Hidrocapital officials. Policy spokespersons used narrative to demonstrate their postures. For them, community outreach began with an attempt to counterbalance historical injustices by following an approach that projected an image of the state deferring to barrio populations. For frontline workers, narratives were not as relevant as practical gestures that demonstrated a posture of renewed commitment to marginalized neighborhoods. The routine's second part, street-based policy dissemination, responded to the practical need to publicize policy. Officials personally disseminating policy on the streets of Caracas barrios raised fears they would face harassment and disruptive interventions from thirsty residents. The risks were real but they were worth it; the benefits obtained from direct policy dissemination outweighed the costs.

The decision to decenter promotion proved fruitful for Hidrocapital in three respects. One, firsthand engagements demonstrated a commitment to gaining appreciation of how barrio residents experienced the hardships of poor quality water service. Such expressions of sympathy helped reinforce the community outreach efforts. They suggested community outreach entailed more than public relations. Two, street-based policy dissemination also yielded opportunities for officials to gain better insights into service problems. These opportunities for learning fall under what Heclo termed the mode of policy making as a process of puzzling—setting up opportunities for thinking and rethinking policy approaches (Heclo, 1974). Neighborhood visits by policy spokespersons entailed opportunities for strategic communication. Spokespersons could publicize the government's broader goals and their relationship to discrete policy programs—effectively, an

open effort to boost governmental legitimacy. For their part, frontline workers drew on *basismo*'s emphasis on 'consciousness raising' to stimulate awareness and unpack the ways state programs recognized the importance of everyday contributions to communal life. They used meaning-making tactics that supplied interpretations of why popular participation contained political meaning. This helped cultivate barrio residents' self-belief they possessed competencies for making civic impact. Third, such engagements disclosed a ground for recruiting the individuals who would make communal mobilization successful. Recruitment in this context meant engaging those residents who showed initiative or expressed interest in greater collaboration. The broader goal was to identify prospective leaders of a MTA committee and establish a line of communication for transmitting information about state policy plans. In short, recruitment was about cultivating potential brokers between state and community.

### *Roadmap*

The account covers developments in between 1999-2004—a period that includes Phases I and II of Chávez government governance and chavismo's development. The first section situates Hydrocapital's policy programs both within Chávez's political project, and draws on a comparison with efforts by Peru's reformist military government (1968-1975) to mobilize the weakly organized. The second examines policy's context, profiling key policy actors, outlining policy programs, and exploring the significance of community outreach to barrios. The third examines policy spokespersons' promotion routines and the fourth analyzes frontline workers' routine. The fourth analyzes frontline workers' routines and considers the hard and soft impacts of GCA policy programs. The conclusion unpacks the significance of frontline workers' efforts for developing a

more comprehensive understanding of chavismo and situates intermediation in the context of the political movement's efforts to mobilize from the state.

## I. From Above: The State's Strategic Role in Chávez's Venezuela

Chávez's military background shaped his political outlook and how he governed. He first gained national recognition by staging a failed *coup d'état* as an army lieutenant colonel in 1992. After being pardoned from jail in 1994, and later, on the campaign trail, Chávez tended to dress as a civilian. Nevertheless, there was little doubt he remained a military man at heart.

As President he carved out an expanded role for the military with the 1999 Constitution. The Constitution “provided the legal underpinnings for a sweeping expansion of military jurisdictional boundaries,” starting with granting military officers the right to vote, which the 1961 Constitution denied them (Trinkunas, 2004, 210). The Constitution's Article 328 revised the mission of the armed forces to include “cooperation in the maintenance of internal order and active participation in national development” (Trinkunas, 2004, 211). This expansion of military jurisdiction significantly augmented their role in traditionally civilian affairs (Ibid).<sup>41</sup>

Patronage paved the way for these changes to take place. Through a careful process of selecting loyalists and isolating opponents, Chávez raised the profile of fellow ‘Bolivarian’ officers—those who supported or participated in the ‘Revolutionary Bolivarian’ Movement's

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<sup>41</sup> The military had played some role in policing and development activities, particularly after a 1976 law on Security and Defense. Norden notes this role can be traced to the armed forces counter-insurgency efforts against 1960s guerrilla groups, pointing to how its exercise of responsibility for internal security set the stage for stepped up presence in counter-narcotics, customs, and counterterrorism, and environmental control arenas (Norden, 2003, 104). Three other changes bear underscoring: the military's gaining of explicit control over “virtually all issues regarding weapons (Article 324) (Norden, 2003, 101); Article 331's transfer of military promotion authority from the Congress to the Executive and the “unification of the armed forces into a single command structure” (Trinkunas, 2004, 211).

February 4, 1992 coup. According to Trinkunas's calculations, the military wing of chavismo—retired or supportive officers—“held up to one-third of the portfolios in the presidential cabinet, including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Infrastructure, and the governorship of the federal district” during 1999-2003 (Trinkunas, 2004, 213).<sup>42</sup>

### *‘Militarized’ State Presence*

These changes at the heights had visible ground level effects. The effects became apparent through Chávez's civilianizing of the military (Norden, 2003). The government's *Plan PAIS* (Country Plan, Plan for Sustainable Immediate Action) enlisted thousands of military officials in direct, block-level action to address problems such as “health, education, nutrition, and infrastructure” (Norden, 2003, 104). *Plan PAIS*—initiated February 27, 1999 to mark ten years since the *Caracazo* riots that featured military repression against the poor—set a new precedent: direct military-popular sector links mediated by material distribution (Norden, 2003, 104-105).

After *La Tragedia* the civilianizing of the military continued when *Plan PAIS* mutated into the *Plan Bolívar 2000*. This second plan also involved a joint military-civilian public works program. Military officers joined with civil servants and Chávez party officials from his *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (Fifth Republic Movement, MVR) to engage in block-level social assistance provision. The Plan's programs, which lasted approximately one year, also included short-term hiring of unemployed barrio residents to fulfill state-funded community service projects

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<sup>42</sup> After the referendum results approved the 1999 Constitution, the political system underwent new elections to seat officials under this new *magna carta*. Those June 2000 ‘mega-elections’—in which voters chose a President, governors, Assemblymen in a unicameral Parliament, and mayors—saw chavismo, then represented at the polls by the *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (Fifth Republic Movement, MVR), convert its popularity into widespread governing power. Though Chávez had a falling out with some military sectors—both active and retired—after the 2000 elections, Norden argues the “military presence in the government remained substantial” (Norden, 2003, 103).

(Trinkunas, 2004, 215).<sup>43</sup> The two plans constituted an important trend: Chávez concentrating energies at the bottom and placing the “military clearly on the side of the poor, in alliance with the Venezuelan masses” (Norden, 2003, 105).

As also occurred in Portugal’s 1974-1975 ‘Revolution of the Carnations,’ this politicization of the military set the stage for political conflict. In fact, Chávez’s politicizing of the military nearly backfired. A *coup d’état* removed Chávez for forty-eight hours—April 11-13, 2002. But the interim government fell apart and Chávez made a heroic return to office April 14, 2002 that helped set him on a path to recovering his popularity (Coronil, 2011).

### *Chávez and State-Society Relations*

In 2003 the government managed to restart oil production after an oil strike (2002-2003) nearly shut down the country’s key export sector. Chávez then survived a Presidential recall referendum in 2004—59% of votes were cast against recalling the President. After these second and third consecutive setbacks for opposition forces, and a rise in the price of oil began in late 2003, Chávez benefitted from much more auspicious conditions. Throughout the highly contentious 2001-2004 period, Chávez used state institutions to reach out to the population and disseminate his government agenda. Simultaneously, a Chávez-headed political party, the *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (The Fifth Republic Movement, MVR), played a substantial role in communicating the President’s message. But, what was striking, in particular when comparing trends with the two-party Punto Fijo system, was the leading role played by state institutions in

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<sup>43</sup> Chávez’s politicization of the military generated a significant amount of blowback within the armed forces. On the specific case of Plan Bolívar, retired officials began organizing groups to create platforms for criticizing what they saw as the military’s decreasingly professional image and the consequences for military readiness. In fact, this criticism made its way into the Presidential campaign of Francisco Arias Cardenas, a former coupster with Chávez in 1992. The very rise of Cardenas as the main opposition candidate in the July 2000 Presidential elections spoke to the blowback effects of Chávez’s politicization.

directly mobilizing popular sectors. “The actions of the government in the barrios,” explained an influential Left-wing politician turned newspaper editor, have tended “to be exercised much more through state institutions, which are more influential than the party inside the barrio” (Interview #52).

The centrality of state-based mobilization drew intense interest from researchers of Latin American populism. Roberts argued that underlying trends defining chavismo’s societal impact suggested important commonalities with cases of populism characterized by extensive state involvement in popular mobilization (Roberts, 2006). But even among the so-called classical examples of populism chavismo exhibited distinctive attributes. The classical cases of populism—Cardenas’s Mexico (1934-1940), Vargas’s Brazil (1930-1945), and Perón’s Argentina (1946-1955)—featured episodes of concentrated mobilization in the labor sector.<sup>44</sup> Chávez, though, did not concentrate on organizing mobilized workers.<sup>45</sup> His government prioritized the mobilization of barrio residents. For the most part this population lacked linkages with national labor federations. According to one estimate, barrio-based populations constituted approximately 50% of the population (13 out of 26 million) (Rivas, 2000, 17-19).<sup>46</sup> In this respect, it is valuable to examine other efforts to mobilize socially unintegrated masses.

### *A Peruvian Experiment: Pueblos Jóvenes (Young Towns or Towns in Formation)*

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<sup>44</sup> On the Cardenas period see Ashby, 1963; Conelius, (1973, 392-498). On Vargas’s Brazil, see Wolfe, 1994 (58): 80-111. On Perón’s Argentina see James, 1988.

<sup>45</sup> In 2000 Chávez did, however, attempt to gain control of existing workers groups, such as the AD-affiliated and once powerful *Centro de Trabajadores Venezolanos* (Venezuelan Workers Federation, CTV). His candidate lost a referendum vote for the Presidency of the CTV.

<sup>46</sup> Roberts cites International Labor Organization statistics indicating that the portion of the work force belonging to trade unions declined from 26.4% in 1988 to 13.5% in 1995 (Roberts, 2003, 61). Also, it bears noting Venezuela is a highly urbanized country, with estimates suggesting between 80-90% of the population lives in cities or metropolitan areas.



In 1968, the incipient efforts of a Lima, Peru-based Catholic bishop to promote self-help groups among shantytown dwellers drew the interest of General Juan Velasco, Peru's head of state. The Velasco government took power in a 1968 coup after overthrowing elected President Belaúnde. The Velasco government scaled up the Bishop's pilot programs of '*Pueblos Jóvenes*' (Young Towns, or Towns in Formation) (Stepan, 1978, 162). In 1968 the government established a National Office for the Development of *Pueblos Jóvenes*, a structure eventually absorbed by the SINAMOS participation institution. SINAMOS—the *Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social* (The National Support System for Social Mobilization)—had the task of “organizing the population into ‘dynamic functional and territorial units’” so as to create a “systematic linkage between the coordinated actions and services of the government and those of the organized population” (Stepan, 1978, 65). These territorial units—the *pueblos jóvenes*—featured elected block committees that directly linked up with state officials in a system of material distribution and interest representation. Such direct links constituted improvements, claimed a government spokesperson, because ““in the past there was no real identity between the leaders of the *barriadas* (barrios) and their residents because the government intervened directly and gave services”” while associations were pressured from ““outside political forces who did not live there”” (Stepan, 1978, 165).

The heavily regimented, nationally-scaled participation program carefully designed a system for distributing material goods (mostly land titles) and for electing candidates to the block committees. For example, candidates for election to a local committee needed to meet four prerequisites for eligibility: a candidate “must be a resident in the *Pueblo Jóven* that he or she will represent, be older than 18 years and know how to read and write, ... have a recognized occupation,” and “have a good police record” (Stepan, 19778, 173). Meanwhile, service demands

and goods distribution were managed at a single hub, the twenty six SINAMOS regional offices (Stepan, 1978, 169). This design narrowed participation by restricting demands to those pertaining to distribution. For example, if committee members received a rejection from the SINAMOS office, they could not turn to a separate state institution for an appeal.

### *Mobilized Participation as Intermediation*

Regime stability served as a key motivation for the *pueblos jóvenes* program. Velasco promoted the program to help fill “organizational space” and thereby preempt potential regime challengers (Stepan, 1978, 188). Yet, the Velasco experiment encompassed more than a preemptive elite response to a potential crisis from below. The normative orientations of Velasco government elites helped infuse this experiment with distinctive characteristics. Consequently, the ‘*pueblos jóvenes*’ projected a vision of the polity.

Stepan describes Velasco government elites as having a dominant normative orientation of “organic-statism” (Stepan, 1978, 122). This orientation rejected liberalism and Marxism in that it opposed emphases on the individual or on class, respectively. Instead, it held a view of an “organic” civil society defined by “solidaristic, participatory, communitarian harmony” (Stepan, 1978, 122). Yet, such an organic outcome needed to be cultivated from without, that is, through the state’s financing and institutional resources (Ibid. 122-123).

A particular conception of participation’s nature lies at the heart of this organic-statist model. Important differences from other cases help capture the specific details. Participation was not restricted to the stage of policy execution or defined in terms of institutional guarantees. Rather, the organic-statist orientation practiced in Velasco’s Peru sought to enable an economic basis for solidaristic participation that overcame the egoism of the individual. The state was fundamental to

creating a fertile environment for such participation. In this sense, intermediation had a dualistic quality: a controlled demand articulation system bound the *pueblos jóvenes* within state parameters while also disclosing a channel for direct interest representation.

## II. Policy's Context and Content: Community Outreach and the Key Actors

The promotion of Hidrocapital policy programs exhibited a common process—policy makers starting small but thinking big. Utility policymakers set the modest goal of installing policy programs. But, they had big dreams and were prone to grand rhetoric about the links between these programs and radical transformation of urban landscapes (McMillan and Spronk, 2014). Only three months after the initial launch of Community Water Management (GCA), Director of Community Affairs Santiago Arconada said, “Placing the aqueduct in the hands of the users is emblematic of this administration’s approach to community participation” (Arconada, 1999, 3). Arconada added a caveat: “a proposal that seems so simple implies profound transformations for the two protagonists: water users and Hidrocapital...I understand this process—in which we are trying to inculcate Venezuelans with consciousness and respect toward public services—will be slow but if it is given appropriate follow-through it may be effective” (Arconada, Ibid).

### *Opportunity Amid Tragedy: Preliminary Signs of a Program's Potential*

After six months of policy promotion, Hidrocapital policymakers found their policy programs directly under the spotlight. When ‘*La Tragedia*’ struck in December 1999 Hidrocapital’s frontline workers were already working on the ground, promoting citizen water committees the utility called *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (MTA). Hidrocapital officials had just begun forming reliable lines of communication with neighborhood leaders who expressed interest in

undertaking the three vital steps to mobilizing an MTA: conducting a local water user census, drawing a rough map of water lines, and diagnosing service problems.

Amid the destruction of *La Tragedia*, Hidrocapital's lines of communication to neighborhood leaders became particularly useful. To begin helping coordinate relief efforts in Vargas state—the zone most affected by *La Tragedia*—Hidrocapital frontline workers reached out to MTA leaders.<sup>47</sup> After obtaining a status report about neighborhood conditions, Hidrocapital sent water trucks to provide fresh supplies of potable water. Also, MTA leaders guided state officials' tours of disaster sites. During these tours Hidrocapital's policy programs gained exposure.

Government officials relayed stories about MTA leaders' efforts to President Chávez, who saw an opportunity. Chávez was not only interested in stories about the resiliency of the human spirit. He had long stressed barrio-based participation as a moral process of restoring democracy's lost dignity (Hawkins, 2010). Chávez weaved stories of participation amid tragedy into his master narrative of the 'Bolivarian' government restoring popular sovereignty by placing *el pueblo*—the common people—at the front and center of politics (Coronil, 2007). Chávez's narrative added critical political context for Hidrocapital officials to draw on while connecting policy programs with changes at the top.

### *The Hidrocapital Policy Team at the Top*

Chávez appointed the three top policymakers at Hidrocapital. The three selections reflected a coalition agreement between the President's party, the *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (Fifth

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<sup>47</sup> Vargas state is a narrow sliver of sea-level land bordering Caracas through the Coastal Cordillera. There, mudslides wreaked the most destruction. Cargo from *La Guaiara* port slid into the sea, commerce shut down, the national airport closed for two weeks, and neighborhoods were buried in debris.

Republic Movement, MVR), and *Patria Para Todos* (Fatherland for All, PPT).<sup>48</sup> Jacqueline Faria, a hydraulic engineer and member of PPT, became Hidrocapital's President. Crisdóbal Francisco Ortiz, an erudite hardworking engineer sympathetic to PPT, served as Faria's deputy as Hidrocapital Vice-President. Alejandro Hitcher, a civil engineer and militant from *La Liga Socialista* (the Socialist League, LS), became the President of Hidroven. Decades before, LS operated as an ultra-Left group that supported armed rebellion against Punto Fijo.<sup>49</sup>

These three urban professionals had extensive experience as Hidrocapital professionals. They worked there in the late 1980s and through the mid-1990s. Moreover, their tenure overlapped with the period when Hidrocapital collaborated with LCR's 'Governing from the Parish' experiment in Libertador.<sup>50</sup> After assisting in this collaboration, this trio ran into trouble.

Subsequent to Chávez receiving a Presidential pardon in 1994, all three supported the idea of Chávez running for the Presidency, an idea still in embryonic form in the mid-1990s. Their support also crossed a line. They were fired by Hidrocapital President Jose Maria de Viana for dedicating work hours and activities to supporting Chávez's political cause (Interview # 24). Their dismissal reinforced an already strong sense of resentment toward 'Punto Fijo' elites. After Hidrocapital, they formed a consultancy, which provided a platform for drafting a '*Plan de*

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<sup>48</sup> PPT formed in 1997 as splinter group of *La Causa R* after leaders divided over supporting Chávez's candidacy. PPT collaborated with MVR as part of the *Polo Patriótico* (Patriotic Pole) alliance during the 1998 elections and Chávez appointed *PPTistas* to prominent positions—e.g., Aristubulo Isturiz, the former Mayor of *Libertador*, became Education and Sports Minister, and Ali Rodriguez, a former Marxist guerrilla was appointed Minister of Energy.

<sup>49</sup> The *Liga Socialista*'s most prominent leader, Jorge Rodriguez, was assassinated by the state security forces in the 1970s. Rodriguez's son, also named Jorge Rodriguez, became a prominent chavista official—serving as Chávez's Vice-President and as Mayor of Libertador. (Orero, 2010, 1592-1593; Eudald Cortina Orero, "Del Foco a La Lucha Electoral: Aproximacion a la Historia de La Organizacion de Revolucion y La Liga Socialista (Venezuela, 1969-1979), Congreso Internacional, 1810-2010, 200 Anos de Independencia, Univesidad de Santiago de Compostela, Centro Interdisciplinario de Estudios Americanista Gumersio Busto, Consejo Espanol de Estudios Iberoamericanos, 2010, pp. 1577-1597/ [http://www.cedema.org/uploads/AT11\\_Cortina.pdf](http://www.cedema.org/uploads/AT11_Cortina.pdf), accessed June 20, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> As Hidrocapital employees, Faria, Hitcher, and Ortiz all attended Water Cabinet meetings in Antimano and El Valle (Interview 17).

*Gobierno*’ (Government Plan) for Chávez’s approach to public services and urban development. In government, Faria, Ortiz, and Hitcher became something of a power troika. From 1999-2005 the tight knit group rotated through the three top posts in the water sector—Hidrocapital President, Hidrocapital Vice-President, and Hidroven President.<sup>51</sup>

### *Inspiration for Policy’s Goals*

Inspiration for policy ideas emerged during a staff retreat Faria called to brainstorm about lessons learned from past experiences (Interview #17). She extended personal invitations to Santiago Arconada, as well as neighborhood activists and participants in the ‘Governing from the Parish’ experiment, particularly ones active in the Antimano and *El Valle* parish ‘water cabinets.’ The discussion underscored two outcomes of Governing from the Parish: generating civic interest in urban planning and increasing the state’s barrio presence. After the retreat, Hidrocapital defined Community Water Management as its overarching policy, and outlined the two implementing policy programs: *Consejos Comunitarios del Agua* (Water Community Council forums, CCA) and *Mesas Tecnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Table groups, MTAs). Last, Hidrocapital hired frontline workers to staff the *Oficina para la Gestion Comunitario del Agua* (The Office of Community Affairs), the new office charged with implementing these policies.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> All three served as Minister of the Environment. Faria served as Minister of the Environment, 2005-2006, Hitcher -2010-2012, and Ortiz, 2012-2013. Their work on the Chávez campaign also strengthened their bonds with other future Chavista leaders they first met at the public Universidad Central de Venezuela (Central University of Venezuela, UCV) in the 1980s. For example, they worked with Julio Montes, a former member of Isturiz’s Municipal Service Commission who twice served as Chávez’s Minister of Housing and Urban Development, and Juan Barreto, a Left-wing intellectual who became a pro-Chávez Caracas Metropolitan Mayor (Raúl Semprún, “La otra cara del movimiento estudiantil,” el 9 de noviembre, 2007 en Edición 78, Política, <http://www.versionfinal.com.ve/wp/2007/11/09/la-otra-cara-del-movimiento-universitario/> , accessed June 20, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Hidrocapital operates over a vast territory, and operations are divided between five systems, each with their own headquarters. For the Metropolitan Caracas area, the utility hired six staff to the ‘Office of Community Affairs.’

### *Policy and Policy Programs*

Official Hidrocapital documents define the overarching policy, *Gestion Comunitaria del Agua* (Community Water Management, GCA), as an “organizational and training” proposal for building shared water management between “utilities and united communities” (Hidrocapital, Official Pamphlet, 2008). An interesting advertisement for GCA published in *Vertientes*—a Hidrocapital magazine for official utility news—casts some light on how Hidrocapital understood shared water management. The image in the advertisement illustrated four constitutive steps in the step-by-step approach for developing ‘Community Water Management:’ participation, organization, agreement, and teamwork (*Vertientes*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September, 1999, Hidrocapital). Interlinked individuals raising their hands stood for participation; a lecturing teacher in front of a blackboard and before a seated class stood for organization; a handshake stood for agreement, and two groups exchanging papers from opposite sides of a rectangular table stood for teamwork (Ibid).

Figure 6.0, Hidrocapital Advertisement for GCA Policy





### *Policy Programs: Water Community Forums and Water Committees*

Hidrocapital's two policy programs offered mechanisms for enabling these four steps. The 'Open-Air' community water forums—the *Consejos Comunitarios de Agua* (CCAs)—invited residents to petition the state about water problems. Likewise, the forums would serve as venues for exchanging information, with residents informing water engineers about the length of time between service delivery to their home and on their block, and state officials providing basic technical facts about water service—e.g., identifying the natural source of Caracas water and explaining processes for treating reservoir water into potable water. Hidrocapital managers in utility President Faria's office had responsibilities for selecting the parishes where efforts would be undertaken to establish contact with local residents and install a CCA forum. Hidrocapital frontline workers undertook this groundwork of making direct contact, organizing a schedule for forum meetings, and setting meeting place for CCAs.<sup>53</sup> Generally, a CCA forum meets twice a month, and usually in the same place, though there are variations depending on the local context. Frontline workers would also chair these meetings, and were also responsible for providing information, recording attendance and notes, and inviting specialists to discuss technical issues.

Beyond providing venues for neighborhood residents to petition the state and for exchanging information intended to make the state more aware of local fluctuations in water service, the CCA forums served as recruiting grounds. Frontline workers sought to use these spaces to promote the block-level *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Committees - MTAs) that first operated as volunteer citizen water committees. MTA creation followed a Hidrocapital-

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<sup>53</sup> In the Caracas context, the Antimano parish provides a representative example of a zone characterized by both regular quality service and critical service problems. There, the street-level sectors, both the commercial and residential populations, receive decent quality potable water service (on an almost daily basis) but those living in hillside barrios receive very bad service—the water rotation schedule averages roughly once every thirty days between). Hidrocapital deemed the latter schedule a critical service example.

outlined process of mobilization with three steps: residents conducting a water user census of a self-defined area of their neighborhood (census), sketching a map of their informal service network (a rough map or blueprint), and proposing solutions (diagnosis) to address service problems.

Fulfilling these steps involved a significant degree of civic engagement. To generate a census, residents went door-to-door to acquire household information about the number of occupants and number of water connections. To develop a map of their informal service network, which officials called a blueprint to boost hope that a plan for action would soon come to fruition, a few residents—usually from the same group—drew a map of their blocks and alleyways, a process that in some cases involved residents mapping an image of their neighborhood for the first time. ‘Diagnosis’ involved residents selecting their preference for a potable water or sanitation project and writing a letter to lay out a case for the project’s importance.

Hidrocapital did not provide explicit instructions about eligibility for membership in an MTA. In fact, policy spokespersons tended to avoid defining the MTAs in terms of leaders, despite the utility's dependence on such individuals to get activities up and running. Consider how these definitions of MTAs neglect the issue of leadership. Santiago Arconada defined the MTAs “as a moment in the life of a community in which it acts in an organized manner both with respect to the issues of potable water and sanitation services and in terms of its broader relationship with the aqueduct it depends on” (Arconada, 2005, 189). Alejandro Hitcher defined MTAs as a space for “*un dialogo*” or “*combinacion de saberes*” (a dialogue or combination of knowledge(s)) between the “*saber popular*” (popular knowledge) of those who built their own homes and the “*saber técnico*” (technical knowledge) of those with engineering degrees (Interview #24). Betty Espinosa, the first director of *Gestion Comunitario* at Hidroven, defined the MTAs according to these functions.

[The MTAs] ...constitute a coordinating mechanism between providers and the community. They have the objective of learning about their services, expressing an opinion about investment proposals before different authorities, in the evaluation and supervision of public works, for which they are legally constituted (as associations) as the law states. They will also have the function of representing the community and citizens groups before service providers, divulge information regarding aspects related to the provision of services in particular about the rights and the obligations of users of the system, orient the participation of the community in the development and supervision of the provision of water service, and propose to the utilities plans and programs for payment agreements, among others (Espinoza, 2002, 29).

The 2001 Organic Law for the Provision of Potable Water and Sanitation Services (the *Ley Organica para la Prestacion de Servicios de Agua Potable y Saneamiento* - LOPSAPS ), describes the MTAs as “representatives” of their community. These group representatives **a)** educate people by providing information about water, **b)** demand better services, **c)** orient the participation of the community in regards to the use of services, **d)** propose water projects, and **e)** collaborate with service providers in the state (LOPSAPS, 2001, Article 77).

Also notable by its absence is a rule framework for decision-making within an MTA. Such matters, policy spokespersons argued, should be addressed by the community itself and in the course of their development. This decision to not impose rules for MTA eligibility, the reluctance to register the MTAs until other state cooperation agreements mandated it, the taboo on discussing the importance of leaders and decision-making responded to two factors. First, Hidrocapital officials hoped people would see these policy programs as creating an open, flexible process of popular participation. As President of Hidrocapital Alejandro Hitcher said in 2009, “the thing [the MTAs] is working well as is, without bureaucracy. The MTA forms on its own and we, as the state, have the obligation to respond and pay attention” to its demands (Interview #24). If policy programs reflected this highly flexible orientation, then, the thinking went, this would induce

participation. In the same vein, policymakers wanted these block-level bodies to appear as authentic, community-defined groups.

The inconvenient truth, however, was that the mandate to carry out a census, draw a map, and diagnose problems implied a state model of mobilization which did not come strictly from below. The state played significant roles, from promoting this voluntary work to being available for consultation. Indeed, the last step of diagnosis—where MTAs proposed solutions through written petitions to the state—presupposed efforts to reach agreements with the utility. Where agreements were reached, MTAs would take on responsibilities as ‘teamwork partners.’ In this fourth and final step in the framework of ‘shared water management,’ MTAs could serve as vehicles for “organized communities” to participate in water affairs through project administration (Hidrocapital, Official Pamphlet, 2009).<sup>54</sup>

### *Community Outreach, Risk and Reward*

Creators of this policy program understood that Hidrocapital's bad reputation posed a serious obstacle to policy implementation. Image problems were manifest in residents' joking references to the utility as ‘*Hidro-criminal*’ (the water criminal). Real outrage about neglect lay beneath the joking. Urban legend held that state engineers suffered verbal and physical harassment when they visited neighborhoods that had gone without potable water for more than 30 days. At

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<sup>54</sup> Such a modality of interaction implied MTA members assuming more responsibilities, such as taking steps to create a formal civil society association. The LOPSAPS law envisioned this possibility in Article 75. It notes that “the subscribers of services can create associations, in conformity with the Civil Code and related laws, with the objective of learning about service management, offering opinions about investment proposals before national, state, and municipal authorities, as well as to evaluate and supervise public works projects that aim to provide water services.... These associations will be denominated *Mesas Técnicas de Agua*. Only for informational purposes, the National Water Superintendent will maintain an updated registry of the *Mesas Técnicas de Agua*” (Article 75, LOPSAPS, 2001). The troika of Faria, Hitcher and Ortiz, as well as prominent frontline workers such as Arconada, roundly rejected these provisions of the law, arguing that such a process of registration would ‘bureaucratize’ the MTAs.

its extreme, harassment could take the form of residents ‘kidnapping’ a visiting water engineer and his vehicle and holding these as ransom in exchange for guarantees of solutions to water shortages.<sup>55</sup> Hidrocapital concluded it had to invest time and financial resources in community outreach.

The point about bad community relations is crucial. The problems for Hidrocapital’s community outreach efforts did not come from traditional factors, such as competition from anti-Chávez political parties. By the same token, a dense network of civil society groups did not already occupy this organizational space in barrios. Rather, after political parties associated with Punto Fijo fell into disgrace and disillusionment with parties expanded into a skeptical orientation toward national institutions, the state was simply less present in barrios. Neighborhood residents had no confidence in the utility’s promises., and consequently, reputation was an obstacle to progress.

Director of Community Affairs Santiago Arconada issued a challenge. He called on his superiors and his colleagues in the *comunitaria* office to view the challenge of repairing relations as an opportunity. To be sure, the opportunity was ridden with risks. Leaving the comforts of state offices to hit the streets meant walking into unfriendly territory. It meant, Arconada said, “confronting the chaos” (Arconada, 2005, 195). By this Arconada meant two types of chaos—the state of physical disarray that characterized water service lines in barrios and the social disorganization of households fighting amongst each other about water problems rather than working as block-collective units (Arconada, 2005, 195).

Arconada’s rallying cry resonated. While the Community Management office had primary responsibilities for “improving the relations between the water utility and communities” (Guerra Silva, 3), it came to be accepted throughout the institution that gaining an initial understanding of

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<sup>55</sup> For an immediate fix Hidrocapital usually sent a *cisterna* private truck that residents directly draw water from.

how barrio residents dealt with water problems had to be a priority. Consequently, community outreach became the practical means by which Hidrocapital created more favorable conditions for installing policy programs.

### III. Narrative, Posture, and Engagement: The Routine of Policy Spokespersons

Policy promoters faced a paradox. On the one hand, officials held the *basista* vision of authentically grassroots participation. On the other, their state institution scripted the process of MTA mobilization and wanted, according to frontline worker Geraldine Rodríguez, to “retake spaces” through policy programs, restoring the state's presence (*Vertientes*, 2003, Number 13, 18). In part, policy promotion routines developed as a strategic response to this paradox—that is, to reduce the tensions that seemed likely to emerge from state institutions seeking to penetrate barrio spaces and stimulate mobilization. At the same time, routines had the practical goal of advancing the interests of policy program installation.

#### 3.1 *Idealizing Popular Participation*

Hidrocapital's top policymakers framed their efforts as fundamentally ‘new participation programs.’ The discourse of newness had the goal of marking a break from the disgraced Punto Fijo system. Hidrocapital officials wanted to reverse the image of what they essentially categorized as the morally corrupted practice of ‘IV Republic participation.’ This reflected Chávez's narrative of his Presidency marking an historical break, the start of Venezuela's so-called V republic. ‘IV Republic participation’ became a *chavista* colloquialism for dismissing non-governmental organizations, unions, and other civil society groups said to reproduce vertical relations between traditional party leadership and rank-and-file. In a 2005 interview Francisco Ortiz—then serving

as the President of Hidroven—essentially criticized the ‘*Asociaciones de Vecinos*’ (Neighborhood Associations) for succumbing to the ‘Iron Law of Oligarchy.’ The Neighborhood Associations and other IV Republic-type groups, argued Ortiz, constituted instances of “false” participation, in which a small group of community residents transformed themselves into an upper echelon alienated from, but acting for, the community (Ortiz, in Lacabana, 2005, 150).

This criticism rested on Ortiz’s belief that participation is a phenomenon that spontaneously emerges from a community of equals. Authentic groups should not have presidents or representatives, only *voceros*—spokespersons. Ortiz and other Hidrocapital officials were not merely trying to reverse the utility’s negative image. They posited the existence of organic processes of association characterized by spontaneous mobilization and solidaristic community as a united whole. Chávez’s speeches and discourse of popular sovereignty, in which he repeatedly homogenized the popular sectors as the sovereign people—‘*el pueblo soberano*’—undergirded these views (Garcia-Guadilla, 2003, 190-192; Arenas and Gomez Calcaño, 2005, 97-128).

Policy spokespersons’ understandings of participation and community translated Chávez’s discourse of popular sovereignty to the micro-level in two respects. First, Hidrocapital leaders believed that within barrio neighborhoods lay the authentic bases of a democratic society. Second, the discourse of the sovereign people fit into a frame of the popular sectors as an organic whole bound together by oppression and a common struggle. As such, communities facing social exclusion needed uniting for a “common good” (Hidrocapital, Dossier, p. 4).

These ideals about ‘collective participation’ and ‘the community’ neglected the state’s integral role in promoting collective action. This was intentional. Hidrocapital officials committed to these ideals in order to better emphasize and honor a popular struggle that, they claimed, previous political elites had been blind to. For example, Ortiz and other officials repeatedly

proclaimed that barrio residents “built their own houses and community life while the state turned a blind eye to urban development for the urban poor” (Ortiz, in Lacabana, 2005). Furthermore, Ortiz observed that hillside barrios appeared on the “city plans as green spaces, that is, as truly excluded” (Ortiz, in Lacabana, Ibid). He argued that residents were not to blame for urban informality and that barrio communities contained histories of unrecognized participation. That is, collectivities came together to build community through self-help development, a form of participation that took place behind the state's back. By implication, participation had not received due recognition.

The state’s abandonment of barrios directly resulted in chaotic service lines. This physical chaos could be visualized by what residents called the ‘spaghetti garden’—streets or walkways lined with narrow water pipes that wrap around each other like tangled hoses, coiling to reduce water pressure flow. Roughly 37% of the population received their water through self-made, unmetered water connections (Lacabana, 2005). But maintaining a deferential posture—one consistent with Chávez’s unconditional praise of the poor—practically mandated that Hidrocapital rule out tariffs for such informal water users.

### *3.2 A Deferential Posture and Rules for Direct Community Engagement*

Instead of using minimally coercive measures—tariffs or penalties for inefficient use of water sources—officials communicated their deferential posture toward barrios through some guidelines for community engagement. Hidroven’s Community Affairs office published these guidelines—in a memo titled “Some recommendations for approaching a community for the first time” (Lathulerie, 2009).



The document urges water sector officials to bear in mind they will be received as outsiders (Lathuliere, 2009). In fact, Hidroven anticipated officials would be received as “strangers” and this would create “natural resistance” to the state’s goal of establishing an accepted and open relationship in which “the community” perceives its proposals possess legitimacy (Lathuliere, Ibid). To ease this anticipated tension, point five asks public officials to encourage the community to get involved in solving its own problems by convincing people what a rewarding process this can be (Ibid, Point 5). Point six notes that officials should primarily listen, not talk, since “all of us like to be listened and have our views taken into consideration, yet this infrequently happens” (Ibid, Point 6). Points eleven and twelve summarized: “we should not invent artificial solutions for communities as these have their own dynamic and reality, which is infinitely rich” and the ultimate goal is to “build collectively” (Ibid, points 11 and 12).

### *3.3 Street-Based Policy Dissemination*

Hidrocapital policy spokespersons dedicated a substantial amount of time and energy to street-based policy dissemination. These visits unfolded through barrio visits that entailed house-to-house canvassing. Commonly, such canvassing involves politicians soliciting votes. But in this instance it entailed policy spokespersons campaigning for participation in policy programs.

When top-level Hidrocapital officials visited barrio communities for house to house canvassing, they often followed a three-point plan. First, they described water as a human right. The Constitution did not explicitly define access to water services as a human right. But, it defined the country’s waters as public goods “essential to life and development” (CBR, 1999, Article 304) and also declared health a “fundamental social right and the responsibility of the state” to provide through policies improving “quality of life” and “access to services” (CBR, 1999, Article 83). For

Hidroven President Cristobal Franciso Ortiz, these Constitutional articles, as well as the 2001 Water Sector law that defined water service as a *bien social* (social good), provided legal backing for the argument that water service constituted a human right (Ortiz, in Lacabana, 2005, 145).

Second, officials borrowed language from the Constitution, beginning by describing ordinary people as playing a “protagonist role” in collective-decision making (CBR, 1999, preamble). Moreover, they called attention to three Constitutional articles (70, 118, 184) that address collective decision-making. Article 70 outlined that political participation can take a range of equally significant individual political forms (voting) and collective socio-economic forms (self-management, co-management, co-operatives) (CBR, 1999, Article 70); Article 118 officially recognized the “right of workers and the community to development associations of social and participative nature such as cooperatives” and the importance of the state to promoting and protecting these associations (CBR, 1999, Article 118); Article 184 created “open and flexible mechanisms” for states and municipalities to decentralize and transfer the management of services to communities and organized neighborhood groups (CBR, 1999, Article 184).<sup>56</sup>

Third, officials proposed ‘co-responsibility,’ an idea meant to generate a sense of shared responsibility among public and private actors (Interview #24). According to Betty Espinosa, the first Director of Hidroven’s Community Affairs department, the term ‘co-responsibility’ captured an argument about the link between rights and responsibilities. “The Bolivarian Constitution laid the path so that in our country co-responsibility in public administration incorporates communities as an active element, utilizing institutional mechanisms of participation, such as involvement in the provision of public services” (Espinosa, 2003, 28). But, she continued, “we are talking about

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<sup>56</sup> Margarita Lopez Maya, who wrote extensively about *La Causa R* in the 1990s, suggests that “the spirit as well as the letter of [Constitutional] articles 70 and 184” can in part be attributed to LCR’s ‘Governing from the Parish’ experience in Libertador. Aristubulo Isturiz, the LCR mayor who installed LCR’s Governing from the Parish policy procedure, served as one of the Vice-Presidents of the National Constituent Assembly that wrote a new Constitution.

a *shared* challenge, a commitment to interaction” that “will contribute to reduced poverty” (Ibid, 30, my emphasis). Participating in CCA forums and creating MTA groups constituted the responsibilities Hidrocapital asked ordinary citizens to shoulder.

#### IV. Frontline Workers: Being Present, Recruiting, and Raising Consciousness

The Hidrocapital Community Management (simply ‘*La Comunitaria*’ in everyday vernacular) office has its headquarters on the second floor of a weathered office building. The building is nestled in the middle of a working class shopping district of Libertador, Caracas and is accessible by public transportation. The *Comunitaria*’s space consists of a private office for the Director, eight cubicles, and a common room for coffee breaks and meetings. Many barrio residents who visit *Comunitaria* headquarters are making contact with the utility for the second time. In all likelihood, communication began when a frontline worker visited a barrio neighborhood.

Of *La Comunitaria*’s six employees, the three most notable frontline workers were Santiago Arconada, the first director of Water Community Management at the Metropolitan system, Manuel González, the second director of Community Management, and Victor Díaz, the third director of the same office. Arconada, Díaz and González were all veterans of the LCR ‘Governing from the Parish’ experience (1992-1995). During that three-year span Arconada was a frequent participant in the Antimano water cabinet meetings, advocating for service projects to improve his neighborhood Santa Ana and the Antimano parish more broadly. Díaz served on the municipal government’s Public Service Commission. González wrote a M.A. Thesis on ‘Governing from the Parish’ as an experiment in building citizenship from below. All three lived in barrio neighborhoods, subscribed to a program of Left wing popular mobilization, and expressed

great interest in raising barrio residents' consciousness by cultivating their residents' untapped potential as neighborhood leaders.

These three, as well as the other three frontline workers, hailed from lower class backgrounds. They each had some experience in social affairs (as activists, lawyers or social workers) and expressed varying degrees of sympathy toward the Chávez government. Their personalities, though, varied. Arconada, Diaz, and Gonzalez had strong personalities. They did not shy away from an argument, enjoyed talking politics on the job, and had temperaments that occasionally ran hot. Dircia Garcia, Edgard Valero, and Geraldine Rodriguez had milder personalities. Their tendencies were to try and defuse arguments, postpone discussions of politics, and to directly go about their business. All exhibited strong communication skills, which they used to establish a ground for dialogue with ordinary citizens from barrio neighborhoods. In part this had to do with their social environments and networks. Four out of the six *comunitarios* lived in Caracas barrios.<sup>57</sup> They either suffered from water service problems or knew neighbors who did, which helped them identify with the struggles caused by this hardship.

The *Comunitaria* office's "fundamental objective" was to ensure that water users "obtain rapid and effective answers to their principal problems, without the need for intermediaries and with the permanent presence of the utility" (Guerra Silva, 3). In reality, though, the entwining of intermediation and permanent presence defined frontline workers' dual mission. Frontline workers presented themselves as the intermediaries, a position they used as a stepping-stone to help the utility gain a permanent presence on the ground.

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<sup>57</sup> The other two lived in modest housing in downtown Caracas, where formal urban lining existed and water service problems only developed in periods of drought.

#### *4.1 Assuming a Deferential Posture*

Frontline workers' professional routine was predicated on making the streets their home base for policy promotion. Their first step was to assume a deferential posture. Assuming a deferential posture meant attempting to counterbalance neglect through positive gestures. For example, in Nuevo Sol, a hillside barrio neighborhood in northern Caracas, Hidrocapital workers faced an uphill battle to improve relations. Nuevo Sol residents received potable water service on a thirty-day water rotation schedule that extended to forty-five days during droughts. Residents were not only thirsty; they were prone to violent actions of harassing water company employees when water service problems grew critical.

To demonstrate concern about Hidrocapital's difficult relationship with Nuevo Sol, all six members of the *comunitaria* office visited the neighborhood together on the first visit (Díaz, Vertientes, 2003, 20). The gesture did not produce immediate results. Subsequently, individual frontline workers continued to visit the remote hillside neighborhood located thirty minutes (by car) from downtown *Catia*—a large working class district and *chavista* stronghold. After approximately six months of holding ad-hoc meetings, the community affairs team gained permission to hold Water Community Council forum meetings at a school building located on a central artery for neighborhood transportation (Díaz, *Ibid*). Hidrocapital had made it into Nuevo Sol but not penetrated the neighborhood corners.

#### *4.2. Recruiting Leaders*

After opening up talks with neighborhood residents, frontline workers turned to recruiting individuals who showed initiative or interest in serving as community leaders. For frontline worker Rodríguez community leaders were paramount. "I think," said Rodríguez, "that the task is to

reactivate leaderships” in the barrios (Rodríguez, 18). Without such leaders serving as state partners, Hidrocapital faced tremendous difficulties to organizing the CCA forums that provided the utility with its first real presence in a barrio. In barrios where frontline workers failed to cultivate leaders as partners, the utility sometimes withdrew from making an effort, as I witnessed occur with Rodríguez’s efforts in three barrios in the working class district of Catia. For example, a community resident often needed to reserve the schoolhouse for a meeting. Likewise, one or two people usually undertook the work of notifying neighbors about meetings to make sure meetings achieved a quorum of around ten people. Frontline workers usually visited communities during workdays and between 9:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M., making it likely they recruited from a pool of homeworkers or of informally employed.

Leadership recruitment often involved frontline workers operating independently. They canvassed streets by themselves, going from door to door in search for prospective leaders. Some frontline workers understood recruitment very well. The experiences of Hidrocapital frontline workers with long activist backgrounds—Arconada, González, and Díaz—taught them about the importance of an individual leadership. They were familiar with the laborious door-to-door work of recruiting people who showed a disposition to participate, had reputations as leaders, or had background in civic affairs. In any case, this was hard work. Patience and endurance were required attributes for these workers tasked with recruiting leaders.

In Nuevo Sol, Victor Díaz and Cesar González each took turns recruiting leaders. Together, they invested years cultivating solid working relationships with Juan and Laura, a married couple that lived in poverty in a shack home where they raised three kids. Juan and Laura were new to community activism in 2000 when they first met Hidrocapital workers Díaz and González at the CCA forums held at the aforementioned Nuevo Sol schoolhouse. Juan worked in the informal

economy and Laura was a homemaker. Juan sold ice cream to cars parked in traffic on the highway that was approximately seven hundred and fifty feet below the hill his home sat upon. Juan took up community activism, he proudly announced at meetings, because of what Chávez and Hidrocapital did to help the poor. He and Laura became the utility's poster child couple for touting participatory gains. They captured the inspiring image of "young, new leaders" that pro-government authors cited as indications of chavismo's social impact (Lacabana and Cariola, 2005, 125).<sup>58</sup> Of course, the participation of this married couple did not mean Hidrocapital had conquered the neighborhood's skepticism. But it gave officials a strong starting point.

In other neighborhoods, frontline workers linked up with veteran leaders. In Baruta municipality's Santa Cruz del Este barrio and in the La Pedrera barrio of Antimano parish, frontline workers Dircia García and Victor Díaz found veteran community leaders. These residents had served as Presidents of the Neighborhood Associations in the 1990s and thus had some experience serving as liaisons between their neighborhood and state institutions.

State officials establishing presence through local leaders reproduced an historical pattern. Lisa Peattie's View from the Barrio illustrated how in Venezuela's 1960s context of party-permeated barrios, party activists doubled as community leaders in eastern Guyana state (Peattie, 1968). Ray's study of Caracas barrios (Ray, 1969) and Powell's study of Venezuelan peasants (Powell, 1971) documented essentially the same pattern.

This precedent may help explain why Hidrocapital's top policymakers treated the topic of neighborhood leaders as a taboo subject. In all likelihood, the idea that policy programs relied to a significant extent on individuals probably generated two worries at Hidrocapital. First, it seemed

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<sup>58</sup> *Comunitarios* from elected and unelected offices of government also visited neighborhoods overseen by the small bureaucratic staff of the *juntas parroquiales*—a parish level board made up of elected representatives and ad-hoc committees on issues such as social services, policing and security, garbage and public health, and so forth. In popular sector neighborhoods, the parish boards tended to be composed of pro-Chávez officials.

to evoke the idea of a community organization headed by a President, which sat at cross purposes with Hidrocapital officials' ideals of popular participation as a collective enterprise. Second, it implied concentration of decision-making in a few hands, which would undermine attempts to work toward these ideals of collective communal action.

More often than not, the weight of these worries overrode any interest in frank discussion about the importance of leadership. Indeed, despite the manifest evidence of leaders' paramount importance to program implementation, Hidrocapital officials did not consider leadership recruitment part of their formal policy toolkit. On one occasion, though, the taboo subject did see the light of day. In 2004, utility President Faria hosted the Hidrocapital Capital Region *Consejo Comunitario de Agua*—a region-wide Community Water Council conference held to take stock of the utility's accomplishments in establishing CCA spaces and forming MTAs. Faria told *Vertientes* “when we try to empower the people *we do not dream that magic happens*. In our communities there have always been leaders..., they understand their potential grows from being united, organized, and acting for the collective interests” (Jacqueline Faria, *Vertientes*, August 2004, 3, my emphasis).

Faria's comments are anomalous. They are a rare example of officials recognizing that leaders need recruiting and cultivation. These observations contained two striking admissions. First, she strongly implied the utility had been recruiting individuals with long track records of activism to join up and participate collectively. Second, she effectively admitted that ‘magical’ solutions to generating participation do not exist. Instead, collective action is organized by state and society.

#### 4.3 Raising Consciousness: *Basismo*, Motivation, and Belief in ‘Power To’



Frontline officials' part time roles as instructors placed on display their specific approaches to educating the public. Here, *basismo*, the current of left-wing thought profiled last chapter as having provided organizers a framework to interpret direct popular participation as political, is highly relevant. *Basismo* is premised on showing 'belief in the bases.' In turn this belief operates like an orientation to engagement. It can dispose organizers to mobilize participation by first attempting to cultivate an individual's unrealized potential. *Basismo* provided frontline workers' a repertoire of meaning making techniques tailored for achieving the objectives of raising popular consciousness and generating individuals' self-belief in the power to make an impact.

#### 4.3.1 *Suspending Disbelief or Really Believing in the People*

During his long tenure as a Hidrocapital frontline worker (1999-2009) Victor Díaz resided in a barrio near the historic town center of Antimano parish. Before living in this poor section of Antimano, Díaz grew up in the famed left-wing neighborhood *23 del enero* (23 of January), a neighborhood that served as a kind of incubator for radical activism in the 1960s and 1970s (Velasco, 2015). Díaz was a longtime activist on the left (mostly with *La Causa R*), and formative experience as a left-wing militant gave him with firm convictions. Díaz believed it necessary to suspend disbelief to place faith in the proposition that alienated actors possessed innate capacity (Díaz, V, Vertientes, Díaz Romero, 2003, 19; Interview 28). A utopian idea, "you have to believe in the people," was the central premise behind Díaz's approach to managing CCA meetings and mobilizing MTA (Interview 28). Believing in the people served as a basis for action in two senses. First, Díaz's acceptance of this premise helped him carry out work in an enthusiastic and optimistic manner. Put differently, believing in the people sustained Díaz's activist vocation. Second,

showing belief in the people sought to engender popular sectors self-belief in their civic competency to make an impact (Díaz, 2003, Vertientes Ibid).

Díaz was idealistic, not naive. He accepted the reality, for example, that levels of participation would invariably ebb and flow as the utility's responses to water service problems improved or worsened. “The majority,” he said, “participate in the critical moments, and afterwards participation remains in the hands of the leadership,... of course, there is still involvement, it [participation] transfers to a process of people relaying the information” (Interview 30). Díaz did not change his public rhetoric of believing in the people. But as he grew to accept this reality during his decade-long tenure at Hidrocapital (1999-2010) Díaz lowered his expectations for successful popular participation.

#### *4.3.2. Latent Competencies*

CCA forums provided spaces for more than listening. Beyond listening to neighborhood members' complaints and demands, frontline workers provided opportunities for officials to make direct appeals to neighbors' unrealized potential as water activists. In encouraging attending members of CCA forums to join up and create a MTA group, Arconada often grew animated and raised his voice while asking the question: “who knows better where the problems with the water service are in the community? The person who built your house and put in the pipe connection or some engineer who lives in an apartment building in downtown Caracas” (Arconada, 2006)? The generative element of this rhetorical question, ‘who knows better,’ sought to incite enthusiasm by asking participants to prove their doubters wrong by showing they already play active roles in public life by rigging up informal water service connections. In this sense, Arconada's essential idea of ‘who knows better?’ seemed to fit within the mold of the Deweyian idea that “the man who

wears the shoe, not the shoemaker, knows best where it pinches” (Dewey, quoted in Fung, 2006). It was with the joint goal of overcoming fear of technical issues and instilling willingness to collaborate on technical matters that Hidrocapital had added the term ‘*Técnica*’ (Technical) between *Mesa* and *Agua* (Table and Water) (Interview #17). The upshot, frontline workers hoped, would be to alert residents to their latent competencies by calling attention to the fact that MTA members possessed ‘technical knowledge’ on some level.

Still, there existed the problem of consciousness. In an observation that demonstrated his favorable reading of Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970), Arconada noted that for an MTA to function well the group is “obligated to equip itself with technical knowledge, but the participants needed to be aware of this fact” (Interview 17). The responsibility of making MTA participants aware of this fact fell to frontline workers.

This effort at raising consciousness helps explain why MTA mobilization entailed residents taking a census of water users, drawing a rough blueprint of the neighborhood’s water lines, and proposing solutions. These steps implied communities publicly discussing the histories of their water service networks to produce a “x-ray image” of the community (Arconada, 2005). They built on ‘the belief in people’ premise Diaz deemed necessary to helping unlock residents’ capacity to participate intelligently.

#### 4.3.3. *Casting Water Service in a Different Light*

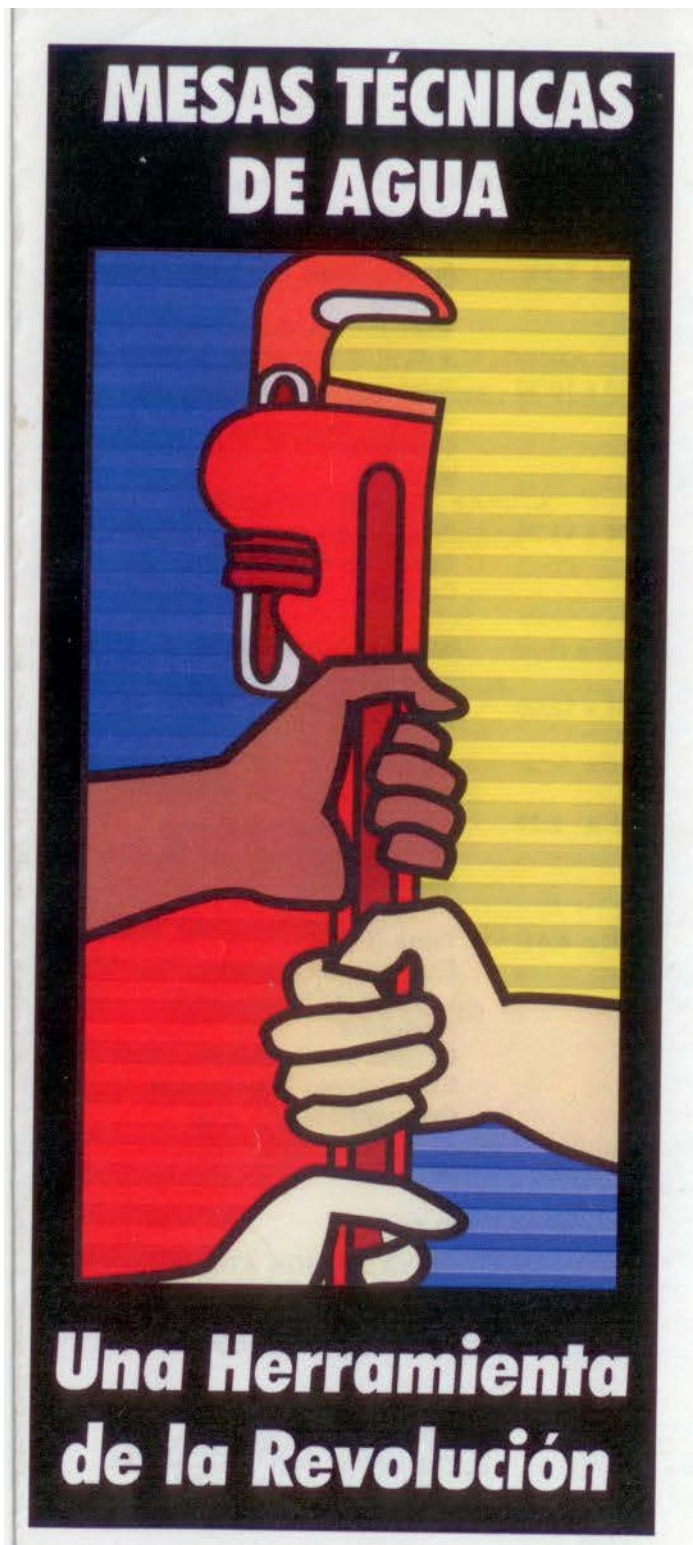
Beyond cultivating self-belief and attempting to generate awareness of unrecognized potential, officials sought to better define the problem of water service so that residents could comprehend what direct participation meant in this arena. While overseeing CCA forums Arconada often faced the plain but complex question: “why do we not have water; why do we not

have sanitation services” (Arconada, 2006, 128)? Arconada instructed fellow *comunitarios* to direct discussion toward the day-to-day implications of inhabiting barrios built without urban planning (Ibid). To effectively address the basic ‘what plagues us’ question residents needed context.

It was important to recognize that water service was manufactured through a delivery and distribution process outside of Caracas. This service consisted of pumping water from a non-Caracas based water source, primarily the Tuy river. Then, water treatment plants made water drinkable and pumping stations sent it with pressure up the hills to the Caracas valley, which sits at 1000 meters of altitude above the Tuy river. It also needed to be explained that formal urban settlements received top priority. This large residential and commercial population paid for water services while the population that Hidrocapital recruits from for forming MTAs comes from the 37% of the population that does not pay anything for water services (Ortiz, 2005).

Casting the discussion of household water usage in a broader context had an explicit purpose. Arconada hoped to guide discussion away from individualistic needs and toward proposals with collective benefits. By the same token, these efforts sought to induce the formulation of requests that implied self-reflection—e.g., “I am part of a hydraulic system whose components I have to care for in the same way they [Hidrocapital] have to take care of the water that arrives to my house through a tube” (Arconada, 2006, 130). In this respect, Arconada hoped awareness of water as a collective problem would increase interest in collective solutions via MTAs.

*Figure 7.0 Hidrocapital's Symbol for the MTAs*



### *Discussion: Hard and Soft Outcomes*

Three elements were critical to increasing the likelihood of successful policy installation. First, Hidrocapital officials became acutely aware of the obstacles bad community relations created for the company, thus heightening the importance of community outreach efforts. When this production resulted in direct and reliable lines of communication with barrio residents, community outreach proved crucial to establishing some form of state presence. Second, policy spokespersons' street-level routines of disseminating policy's value and promoting policy programs helped ground abstract claims about popular participation. In the case of frontline workers, grounding policy promotion in the street not only helped them translate the principles behind policy. It aided the cause of installing policy programs by creating opportunities for officials to recruit leaders favorably disposed to state programs. Third, the backgrounds and qualities of the personnel made a difference. Frontline workers did not consciously preach *basismo*. Their repertoire for mobilizing participation incorporated components of *basismo* thinking. The basismo intellectual framework helped frontline workers make better arguments about why participation in the CCAs and MTAs was political in so far as it included them in collective-decision making on a micro-scale.

Figures for the number of CCA forums and MTA committees in the Caracas area and beyond illustrate the degree to which the utility established some state presence. Hidrocapital, which by the end of 2003 employed 15 frontline workers dedicated to promoting the CCAs and MTAs in its three zones of operation, the Caracas metropolitan area, Miranda state, and Vargas state, could take credit for mobilizing 544 of the national population of 1200 MTAs—(*Vertientes*,

April 2003).<sup>59</sup> According to the Hidrocapital's Coordinator for Community Management, the administrative supervisor for the utility's five Community Management offices, at 2006's end there existed 42 CCA forums. 24 in the Caracas Metropolitan zone, and the utility set a goal of establishing three new ones a year (Interview #43).

The Director of Community Affairs argued the numbers actually indicated signs of a shift in state-society relations. "They," he said, referring to MTAs and regular participants in the CCA forums, "have confidence in us, despite the fact that in many of the neighborhoods we convoke to meetings [CCAs], we offer a poor quality service" (Interview 28). Quizzed why confidence in the institution may grow even without service improvements, the Director suggested that "meeting attendees leave forums with a sense of having received a response," as in having been heard and responded to (Interview #28).

This observation points up a strength and weakness of Community Water Management's focus on community outreach. On the one hand, the emergence of intermediation processes entailed examples of reestablished state presence and symbolic recognition. This helped infuse the policy with concrete objectives and a broader sense of political missions. On the other hand, Hidrocapital emphasis on outreach as the key part of Community Water Management implied the risk of public policy programs becoming ornaments," that is, the possibility of policy programs being "seen as a form of public relations management for the barrios" (Arconada, 2005, 193). In short, if Hidrocapital prioritized the promotion of its policy programs to the exclusion of providing better water service, no change to the underlying situation of state neglect could occur. Between

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<sup>59</sup> By 2003's close, the national water agency Hidroven reported that Water Community Management Offices existed or were being opened at a majority of the country's state-owned water utilities, both the regional level and state level entities. Nationally, approximately 1200 MTAs existed alongside 72 base-level administered cooperatives that worked as subcontractors on utility construction projects (Hidroven, Vertientes, January 2004, Edition 14).

1999-2004, the Chávez government moved from establishing its new institutional framework for exercising power through a new Constitution to battling with the opposition for control of state power through a coup and economic strike that struck at the heart of the economy by nearly shutting down the oil sector. In this respect, the lack of changes in the quality of service was disappointing but arguably understandable.

### Conclusion: Frontline Workers, Chavismo, and Intermediation

Hidrocapital's frontline workers received front and center attention in this account. I emphasized that frontline workers made real impacts on the ground and that they had multiple attachments. Their behavior was shaped first by a professional relationship to their employer and also by their embedded social positions in networks of political activism that inspired belief in elements of the chavista project. What is the broader significance of these multiple attachments for developing a better understanding of chavismo as a political movement?

As government employees, frontline workers shaped policy implementation overseen by the Community Affairs office at Hidrocapital. As Venezuelans with backgrounds in street-based activism, state employment implied a major change for these individuals. It involved re-situating activist repertoires they developed in the popular sector movement. Their career change to state-based activists relates to a characteristic pattern of chavismo's populism: the convergence of bottom-up and top-down processes with different temporal scales. This convergence set the stage for a tension-ridden reconfiguration of the ways elements at the bottom and top mutually constituted each other.

This insight about the significance of frontline workers to chavismo directly relates to my historicized approach to chavismo's emergence and evolution as a case of populism. The challenge



and value of this approach is to draw connections between patterns of political development with different temporal scales. Establishing these connections has a very practical value. It helps cast light on the overlapping relationships that elements of chavismo established with segments of society through state institutions.

For example, my account differs from those accounts that center on how Chávez used the military as an instrument for consolidating power and directly influencing social conditions on the ground (Norden, 2003; Trinkunas, 2004). Not only do we know less about how Chávez used civilian state policy making instruments for making targeted social impacts on a sectoral basis. We also know less about the interactions between this policy arena for linking top and bottom by implementing policies that symbolize the government platform. Moreover, by reviewing the sequence from before Chávez came to power we gain an enhanced understanding of the interaction between military and civilian state institution processes.

First, a bottom-up political development shaped how former activists recruited to serve in the Chávez government set policymaking priorities. Essentially, this development concerns the relationship between *basismo* and Hidrocapital's policy programs, measures that drew inspiration from both the LCR Governing from the Parish experience and Chávez's Bolivarian project. It is no wonder Hidrocapital officials placed such an emphasis on promoting state-based popular participation programs. The six key Hidrocapital officials for designing and implementing GCA programs—the troika at the top and the frontline workers Arconada, Díaz, and González—considered Governing from the Parish a formative experience. The preceding chapter argued that Governing from the Parish contained strong traces of a *basista* understanding of politics that calls attention to communal management as a potentially 'radical political activity' defined by "multi-layered, well-informed, scaled political interventions" (Lehmann, 1990, 198). This chapter argued

that Hidrocapital's emphasis on promoting state-based popular participation signaled basismo's continuing influence through the vehicle of Chávez government efforts to mobilize at the base level.

Second, a top-down political development concerning political competition shaped the Chávez government's interest in establishing state presence. Plain and simple, the Chávez government's broader efforts to mobilize popular sectors via the state increased its political power. Notwithstanding the strategic role of the military, support from below helped the President outflank the opposition during the challenging period marked by a Constitutional reform (1999), '*La Tragedia*' (1999), mega elections mandated by the new Constitution (2000), a failed coup (2002), an oil strike (2002-2003), and a Presidential recall referendum (2004). After failing to remove Chávez, opposition parties were in a state of disarray. Divided over strategy, they abstained from participating in the 2005 Parliamentary elections, and chavismo gained near complete control of the National Assembly. Moreover, after the opposition came out on the losing end following this particularly turbulent four-year period from 2002 to 2005, anti-government parties and leadership organizations underwent a period of soul searching. Meanwhile, Chávez plowed ahead and announced his project's '*salto adelante*' (leap forward), a move that implied a radical turn.

By describing water sector dynamics as resulting in intermediation, this chapter stressed that building blocks for mobilization were in place before Chávez made announcements that signaled radicalization. Providing this context simply establishes the point that parts of the Chávez government took seriously the need to rebuild bridges with base level groups after the collapse of Punto Fijo institutions and the emergence of the local arena amid decentralization. It does not amount to a warrant for arguing that Hidrocapital policy programs constituted part of a master plan, even if they indirectly contributed positively to Chávez's consolidation of power.

There are two crucial aspects about intermediation in the water sector. One, it brought top and bottom closer than they were before. Two, it accomplished this while bringing to light what may be thought of as a reassuring basis for communication and interaction. The state solicited participation from community groups but did not compel communities to pay for informality by, for example, requiring they honor debts incurred by squatting or illegally tapping into service lines. In this sense, intermediation set a foundation for the state to mobilize a two-way dynamic of participation—groups would have opportunities to express demands and policy makers would have opportunities to shape preferences. However, with Hidrocapital mostly omitting from discussion the costs of service production and tariffs—issues that capture coercion in the context of a service relationship—intermediation came to be associated with cost-free community development.

## Chapter 4: ‘Too Big to Fail.’ Community Development and Mobilization under Chávez (2005 to 2007)

If measured by his mastery of the media, Hugo Chávez was a modern man of the people. Millions of Venezuelans watched Hugo Chávez on his Sunday television show ‘*Alo, Presidente*’ (Hello, President). The most common format of *Aló* involved Chávez chairing a meeting with ministers while he received what were in all likelihood pre-screened phone calls from ordinary Venezuelans. *Aló* extended for hours, with Chávez mixing in singing and other theatrics between exchanges with ordinary Venezuelans, strong rhetoric against traditional elites, and policy making announcements. *Aló* was great political theater. Much could be learned about Chávez’s personality and ruling style by watching the show.

For example, *Aló* provided a stage for Chávez to perform a classic Jekyll and Hyde routine. He demonstrated hard and soft sides as he went about establishing antagonistic and friendly relationships with different publics. On the air Chávez issued harangues against opposition politicians whom he described as ‘squalid,’ he publicly shamed ministers, and he criticized pro-government congressmen for underperforming. On the other hand, Chávez’s interactions with political sympathizers from Venezuela’s popular sectors featured the President showering praise on *el pueblo*—the common people—for their moral uprightness and hardworking ways. Thus, on the one hand, he acted as a demanding, uncompromising leader. He never wasted an opportunity to attack his opponents and demanded discipline and results from his administration. On the other hand, he acted as a lenient guardian. He excused popular sectors actors’ imperfections as developmental challenges and instead emphasized their strong moral character.

The dual character of Chávez’s leadership was more than an act. It was a reflection of chavismo’s overarching political model in which Chávez’s crude distinction between the people and bourgeoisie sought to project an image of society divided into pro- and anti-Chávez camps

and split along class lines (Hawkins, 2010). Strong anti-bourgeoise rhetoric alone would have been an interesting phenomenon. Venezuelan politics was often free of polarization during Punto Fijo (1958-1998) when, generally speaking, politicians articulated a narrative of racial unity, national progress, and social cohesion (Coronil, 1997). But Chávez did not just talk the talk. What made chavismo's populism so full of different meanings was that he moved beyond rhetoric about the masses to actually mobilize them (Roberts, 2006). Chávez was indispensable to mobilization but quite simply this process required more than Chávez. At the center of it all was a multi-layered process of Chávez steered, institutionally-mediated efforts to engender mobilization at the base level.

*'It Cannot Fail:' Chávez and Laissez-Faire Community Development*

July 30, 2005 Chávez presided over the plenary session of the III Congress of Community Water Experiences. National water authority Hidroven convened the conference, which was attended by senior government officials from Chávez's cabinet and over two hundred *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Committees, MTAs) from across the country (Hidroven, 2005, 173). The first two Congresses of Community Water Experiences included participation from President Chávez but the political context in 2005 was much different. A year before, in August 2004, Chávez survived a recall referendum, defeating a ballot initiative to cut his term short by a decisive margin (60%-40%). The referendum reinforced Chávez's popular legitimacy, and, on top of this, the President began to exercise much more control over state oil company PDVSA after his administration replaced approximately 20,000 employees, most of whom were fired for engaging in political sabotage. Moreover, with the price of oil on a steady climb, the country's economic foundation seemed to be growing stronger. Chávez arrived at the III Water Congress

politically and economically stronger and during the event he showcased his willingness to spend for the sake of community development. As a result, the III Congress of Community Water Experiences proved to be much more than a water sector event—an opportunity to cap a year of achievements in potable water services and community water management policy. In fact, I argue, it marked the start of a new pattern in base-level state-society relations.

The congress is a catalytic event for tracing how Chávez steered into place a *laissez-faire* approach to community development. Of course, the government of course did not title its approach *laissez-faire*. But in fact Chávez government institutions practiced something that evokes the liberal spirit. Generally speaking, state institutions self-consciously refrained from interfering in *barrio* groups' administration of development funds. Unregulated administration of state funds became the dominant pattern of the community development processes that characterized base-level state-society relations from 2005 through 2007.

At the plenary session of the Congress, with Chávez presiding, water sector officials formally announcing budget agreements to fund 113 water development projects MTA groups would manage (Hidroven, *Ibid.*, 174). The conference's main event followed. Ten community leaders made on-stage presentations about water development projects their MTAs had discussed and designed with their corresponding local water utility—i.e., an MTA from Barquisimeto, the capital of Lara state, had worked with Hidro Lara. The lively dialogues Chávez held with MTA leaders had more than entertainment value. These exchanges, which I deconstruct through content analysis, divulged critical insights about the Presidents's views regarding what state-society relations and policy implementation should entail regarding community development project managed by government-sanctioned community groups, such as the MTAs.

Amid a presentation from Juanita Delgado, a member of MTA La Pedrera in the Antimano parish of western Caracas, Chávez interrupted and asked when project construction would begin. Ortega riposted, “when you, sir, make the funds available!”—a remark that generated laughter and cheers from the audience. After letting the laughter die down, Chávez snapped to attention and asked about the status of the funds scheduled to be available for projects such as these. He expressed disappointment when he learned of delays that would prevent Ortega from starting construction in the next month. Chávez ordered his government to expedite the process of grant distribution and encouraged government officials to deliver observable examples of positive results as soon as possible. Later Chávez expanded on this point.

This [the community projects] is so important *it cannot fail*. Because we are taking the first steps. From the success of these first steps, upon this first seeding, depends the future. Where we make a mistake, we make a mistake, and we will make the correction as we go along. We should have a grand success before this year ends (Chávez, July 30, 2005, my emphasis).

Chávez’s observation that these projects “cannot fail” is a clear and particularly concise example of how his leadership style of being lenient toward popular sector sympathizers was likely to have ramifications for policy implementation. Crucially, Chávez’s leniency was malignant. Unlike the relatively benign credulousness with which frontline workers promoted peoples’ innate capacity for community participation—shown in Chapter 3—Chávez’s excessive mercifulness contributed to the mismanagement of precious state resources. His leniency paved the way for the state to adopt a *laissez-faire* approach to letting the invisible hand of the people administer development funds at their discretion.

### *Research Questions and Roadmap*

My field research—which included participant observation of twenty seven state-funded barrio group-managed development projects—suggests that community development generally unfolded according to a three-step pattern—1) barrio groups organizing in government-certified organizations, 2) these groups soliciting community development project funding, and, 3) finally, groups executing a development project without being subject to state regulation of how they managed development funds or facing the threat of penalty for mismanagement.<sup>60</sup> This pattern exhibited the greatest degree of homogeneity in the last step—project execution free from state interference. However, considerable diversity existed within the first two steps—that is, how groups marshaled resources for collective action and how they established communication with state institutions to solicit community development funds. More importantly, when this 2005-2007 pattern is compared with its preceding context, it is possible to see how change and stability intertwined when it came to state-society relations under *chavismo*. Put differently, in the broader sweep, there was no static pattern, and grasping what changed requires examining how community development in the MTAs and CCs helped open new possibilities for collective action at the interstices of state and society.

The first section has three objectives: a) to develop a middle range definition of mobilization that allows us capture collective action's top down and bottom-up dimensions, b) to establish an analytic basis for unpacking mobilization in terms of embedded processes and trend-shaping policy events, and to c) map the relationships between institutional context and base relations and draw out the insights that help us determine the different types of collective action that prevailed between 2000-2006. The second section unpacks Chávez's discourse at the Third

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<sup>60</sup> More often than not, the exceptions to this approach reflected political meddling. For example, the government tended to manage its relationship with barrios groups led by known opposition supporters differently, namely, by creating more obstacles to mobilization by delaying certification processes. I discuss such political meddling more fully in chapter 6.



Congress of Community Water Experiences into four guiding principles of action for state-society relations in the arena of state-funded community development. The third section reviews state documents to demonstrate how government institutions codified these principles for action into procedures. The conclusion discusses mobilization's overlapping elements of change and stability, thus providing a basis to characterize this phase in chavismo's populism as not only the movement's peak period in terms of promoting collective action but also a liminal juncture between mobilization and partisan oriented organization.

### I. Mapping State-Sponsored Mobilization, 2000-2006

A significant amount of literature on chavismo centers popular participation as the main process for comprehending the political movement's impact at the base level (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; Ellner, 2007; Hawkins and Hansen, 2006; Hawkins, 2010, 2011; Collier and Handlin, 2009; Goldfrank, 2011b; Smilde and Hellinger, 2011). This literature has a lot to offer, particularly for enriching understanding of what distinguished the phase of fully developed populism (2005-2007) of Chávez's rule (1999-2013) from the Punto Fijo period (1958-1998) when tightly controlled party organizations narrowed participation opportunities to party channels. However, it may be counterproductive to center participation as the main process.

Scholars have consistently asked probing questions about the autonomy of this participation under chavismo, even as it developed outside party organizations. Critics have asked at least two questions—should collective action be understood as evidence of the government's new institutions for participation (Cameron, et al., 2013) or as a rational self-interested response to material incentives (Corrales and Penfold, 2009)? These questions call for research to critically assess what factors elicit participation entails and what ends it serves—i.e., what compels

participants and what broader interests are at stake in collective decision-making processes? I argue this debate is rooted in a problem of descriptive diagnosis—the fundamental issue of what term best defines processes on the ground. Moreover, I argue there is much to be gained by changing terms from participation to mobilization and thereby shifting the lens of analysis from interpreting collective action under chavismo as akin to voluntaristic civic activity and instead understanding it as induced political behavior. However, this does not mean mobilized collective is completely top-down.

It is particularly useful to examine the distinction between participation and mobilization proposed by Sartori. He points out that normative and descriptive uses of the term participation as a "basic tenet of the democratic ideal" or as "reflecting a democratic experience," respectively, strongly imply evidence of "self-motion; it does not mean being manipulated or coerced into motion" (Sartori, 1970, 1050). In this respect, Sartori argues, participation is the "very opposite—or very reverse—of mobilization," which refers to "a malleable, passive collectivity which is being put into motion at the whim of persuasive—and more than persuasive—authorities" (Ibid). Whether or not we fully agree with Sartori's definitions of participation and mobilization, the main implication of his distinction is crucial—individuals "participate" but they do not mobilize; rather, they "are mobilized" (Ibid, 1051).

Jansen's recent study of populism as a process defined by political mobilization is a useful example of what we gain by centering mobilization (Jansen, 2011). In his account, a populist "project of political mobilization" is defined as any "sustained, large-scale political project that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action, while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes ordinary people" (Jansen, 2011, 82). This definition is particularly helpful since it specifies the linkage between a project—

“concerted and sustained set of political activities—a package of mobilizational and discursive practices that maintain a degree of enduring coherence, both in terms of its rhetorical underpinnings and its ongoing enactment” (Jansen, 2011, 82)—and the subjects being mobilized. The problem with this conception is that political mobilization is preconceived as contentious, thus resulting in a kind of mirror image of accounts that suggest populist mobilization is necessarily clientelistic (De la Torre, 2000, Penfold, 2007; Hawkins, 2010).

A practical solution is to refer back to Nettl who defined political mobilization in plainly analytic terms. Paraphrasing his classic account, Nettl defined mobilization as the inducing of a commitment to action and translating that attitude into observed public behaviors informed by norms (Nettl, 1967, 32-33). Tilly adopts a similar approach with a process-based definition—a process “by which a group goes from being a passive collective of individuals to an active participant in public life” (Tilly, 1978, 69). These conceptions move us toward a middle ground between Sartori's ideal type poles of participation as self-generated and mobilization as coerced. For example, mobilization can involve a context that stimulates commitment to action while the exhibited public behaviors may be thanks—in great part—to personal initiative. In other words, individuals may be persuaded to mobilize but they may also demonstrate agency, making it a matter of interpretation whether mobilized behaviors, as per Weber, “uphold, change or overthrow, to hinder or promote” authority relations (Jansen, 2011, 82).

I underscore Nettl's understanding of political mobilization. This definition of political mobilization as induced behavior informed by norms provides significant analytic leverage for examining a case in which there is mass mobilization—i.e., Venezuela under Chávez. In such cases it is difficult to pin down one form of mobilization and, as such, it is crucial to distinguish among the electoral, policy, protest, and communal domains in which governments and parties attempt to

induce public behaviors. For example, between 2000 and 2006 the Chávez government faced a range of different political contestation and policy changes and it promoted many different groups, resulting in a shifting, kaleidoscope-like organizational landscape (Roberts, 2006). Moreover, some groups received inducements to mobilize in one domain and overt pressures to mobilize in another. The approach taken here is to categorize all Chávez-promoted groups as instances of mobilization but to assess how the shifting institutional context produced different types of public behavior over time. While this is appropriate for the case, because the ground of collective action shifted amid fluctuating levels of intense period of contestation, we cannot simply say mobilization changed. That would not shed very much light on the problem. Thus, we need a basis with which to distinguish examples of mobilized groups. This way discussion can produce comparatively theoretical implication for cases where mass mobilization creates examples of buzzing state-society interactions that blur the lines between politics, policy, and protest.

### *Unpacking Mobilization: Processes and Policy Events*

To offer a structured review of base-level state-society relations between 2000 and 2006 this account examines the themes of collective action processes and considers how pivotal policy events subsequently shaped which themes strengthened or weakened. There are two premises: processes of collective action, which refer to the dominant theme of participation, are theoretically prior to empirical trends and patterns. Establishing trends and patterns requires marrying analysis of processes with pivotal events. It is important to clarify that groups do not—e.g., the MTAs or the Communal Councils—constitute a process. To identify processes it is necessary to comprehend the practices associated with groups, and thereby tease out the dominant theme. Furthermore, to capture the dominant theme associated with groups' practices, it is crucial to examine the policy

event that surrounded their origins and formative developments. The notion of policy event captures the idea that examining the statutory or legal context alone will not provide sufficient insight into the core meanings about these groups. The value of the term is that it is suggestive of an eventful context, which draws attention to how collective action related to the polarized context of heated contestation between Chávez and the opposition. I identify two underlying processes embedded in state-society relations and two critical policy events.

These two processes are popular development and popular voice. Popular development has a comparatively social character in relation to community development, which is defined by a technocratic design and a technical character. Popular development refers to development activities that are open to the public and or contain a non-trivial degree of publicly spirited action; it is public or of the people in so far as it derives from actions undertaken by some significant portion of ‘the people’ in the community. We have to be careful about describing such practices as amounting to local democracy, even if they evoke essential principles of self-government. To capture the collective impact of development activities that are plausibly understood as popular, and therefore have the texture, if not the substance of, self-government, I describe them as entailing a social character. A process of popular development, I propose, refers to the state establishing mechanisms for transferring community development resources to barrio groups that marshal local collective action and manage project administration in a reasonably public manner that entails an observable degree of community spirit.

By contrast, community development is for the community but it may not entail development activities directly authored by the people. Its impact is collective. But, because an external sponsor or agency performs the bulk, if not the entirety, of the work, the effects are primarily technical—they are felt in terms of micro-level economic change. In short, community

development is technocratic—it is performed by the few as opposed to the many— and its economic effects illustrate its technical character.

Processes that produced opportunities for popular development predated the government's funding of the MTAs and its subsequent promotion of the Councils. This history is illustrated by different instances of state funding for cooperatives and various self-help organizations (Monserat, 2005; Ellner, 2007). Between 2000-2004 popular development existed on an episodic basis; far from a regularized pattern it was a weak trend.

As used here, popular voice has a collective character in that individuals may be making demands and decisions but these actions are observably rooted in some group structure. Processes of popular voice refer to state institutions cultivating institutional mechanisms for including barrio-based groups' voices in collective decision-making. These processes had an independent, pre-2005 history. In fact, both a Local Public Planning Law (2002) and a Municipal Administration Law (2005) reference Communal Councils. These cast Councils as groups for channeling vertically oriented popular voice—making demands and claims on the state (O'Donnell, 1999). However, the polarized political context and Chávez's centralizing tendencies not only reversed the gains of decentralization but also reduced the opportunities for popular voice to be used as a mechanism for demanding state accountability.

With processes linked to popular voice and popular voice embedded, Chávez began distributing community development grants, first via the MTAs in 2005 and then the Councils in 2006. Policy events providing specific connotations about the meanings of these groups subsequently determined the significance of their public behaviors. Chávez's speeches about the Councils and a 2006 Law for them assigned the groups the role of direct project management. This

included situating Councils within state supervised processes of administration and project management.

The government's increased funding for community development had important consequences for the strength of popular development and popular voice. It created "voice prone" situations in which barrio groups found themselves on a path to arrangements marked by "institutionalized voice," a term Hirschman developed to emphasize the incentives two parties have for maintaining sound relations and or a mutual affiliation (Hirschman, 1981, 222-223). Institutionalized voice reduces the rationale for contentious vertical voice (Ibid). Similarly, the reduction of space for vertical voice made the ideal type combination of development and voice—popular interest group representation—less likely. For instance, existing base-level groups that adopted a contentious posture toward the state faced the possibility of extinction when the government mandated they rearrange as Councils.

However, institutionalized voice needs to be distinguished from silence. The very intensive energies poured into the process of mobilizing a Council and making it eligible to receive development grants opened the possibility of neighborhood populations cultivating horizontal voice. According to O'Donnell, "horizontal voice" refers to the perceptions of collective identity and civic efficacy that can undergird collective action (O'Donnell, 1999, 65). Horizontal voice is form of popular voice. From the perspective of democratization, it is not as strong a form of popular voice as vertical voice. But, neglecting its centrality to "dispelling" the feelings of "isolation and mutual distrust" that tend to prevail among marginalized populations would greatly impoverish discussion of collective action at the grassroots (Hirschman, 1984, 56). For example, when the state transferred development resources to groups that implemented a project by either opening decision-making to public consultation or executing project construction activities in a

publicly spirited manner, this process tended to entail horizontal voice; project administration tended to have both technical and social dimensions, and development was popular.

Furthermore, an elective affinity needs to be underscored. When development was popular, mobilization tended to be institutionally-mediated by frontline workers of the state, not militant partisans of the chavista movement. Though institutionally-mediated mobilization existed—as I show in chapter 5—there is not enough evidence to argue it constituted a dominant type. Institutionally-mediated mobilization resulting in popular development represented the hope of the *basista* cell in the state but this group’s influence should not be overstated, as argued in Chapter 3.

The second policy event concerns politicization. Chávez began assigning the groups that received development resources—the Councils and the MTAs, for example—more or less explicit political status in 2007. The granting of political status took place via ideological branding that accredited groups as Bolivarian. For example, Handlin argues that *chavismo* redefined class mobilization by recasting economic cleavages in terms of associational cleavages (Handlin, 2008). As a result, *chavismo*’s branding of government supported groups as Bolivarian helped give the groups dual meaning—as both of the popular sectors and of a particular political persuasion. This hybrid meaning for the Councils, and thus for community development projects more broadly, subsequently came in very handy for *chavismo*’s efforts to orient popular participation toward partisan organization. Consequently, before Chávez began attempting to organize at the base level through his socialist political party (founded in 2007), the likelihood of two other types of collective action increased: 1) partisan development, which, despite the partisan branding, did not foreclose the possibility of popular development—if the *barrio* group’s actions remained open to public consultation in the community and its project was implemented by a substantial number of people in the community the layering of partisan politics did not nullify these other gains, and 2)



surrogate messaging, a process of co-opting collective voice in which an institution disseminates political information through the group, thus transforming it into a vessel.

*A) Captured Voice and Community Development: Bolivarian Circles and Social Missions*

In November 2001 Chávez used decree powers to pass 49 laws. Opposition-linked interest groups took to the airwaves to decry the so-called ‘*decretazo*’ (a momentous use of decree power) as authoritarian in nature. Chávez needed to counteract this message, but his Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) party was in disarray. Earlier that year Chávez had ordered the MVR’s reorganization into a base-level movement loosely modeled on the *Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano* (Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200, MBR-200), his underground military group from the 1980s (Garcia-Guadilla, 2003). During this reorganization, Chávez called for supporters to mobilize block-level Revolutionary Bolivarian Circles. Then, with the need to counterbalance opposition to his decrees, he heightened the profile of the Circles (Hawkins 2010, 177).

Executive office institutions disseminated the initial guidelines for forming a Circle. 7-11 volunteer activists staffed the groups, and members swore to defend the Constitution and promote the government’s platform. On December 17, 2001 Chávez personally presided over a swearing in ceremony for 20,000 to 30,000 Bolivarian Circle members (Hawkins, 2010, 177). In Chávez’s words, the Circles served as a “a popular force spread out in slums, towns, countryside and cities in order to consolidate, ideologize, and reinvigorate itself, thus contributing to the Bolivarian revolution” (Chávez, quoted in Garcia-Guadilla, 2003, 192).<sup>61</sup> Residents who assembled Circles

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<sup>61</sup> The label of the Circles as Bolivarian resonated with Chávez’s political narrative of appropriating the legacy of Simon Bolívar and they also had roots in the history of chavismo. While laying the groundwork for his Presidential campaign in the mid-1990s, Chávez organized Bolivarian Circle Roundtables to discuss his movement’s goals. (Lopez Maya, 2003).

tended to be of lower class backgrounds and had mobilized out of personal devotion to Chávez (Hansen and Hawkins, 2006). In placing militant new activists on center stage, the Circles captured the increased salience of popular sector actors.

Assembling a Circle did not require intensive participation. But, the groups were voluntary and thus implied some initiative on the part of leaders (Hawkins, 2010, 178). The government placed few obstacles in the way of those interested in forming a Circle and the groups' rapid growth resulted in a 2.2 million-strong base of mobilized chavistas (Hawkins, 2010, 177). They carried out a range of political messaging and community service activities while exhibiting "a semblance of self-determined rules to guide their conduct" (Hawkins, 2010, 178). Though they exhibited autonomy in some areas, the Circles' linkage to Chávez had important indirect effects. The government's branding of the Circles as 'Bolivarian' groups meant Chávez deemed them authentic representatives of the 'people' (Arenas and Gómez-Calcaño, 2005). This designation of the Circles foreshadowed major challenges for a pluralistic organizational landscape.

The Circles played highly visible roles amid political instability. They assisted Chávez's government when it faced two regime threatening events, an abortive *coup d'état* in April 2002, and an oil strike in December 2002-January 2003. Their enthusiastic participation in pro-government street demonstrations signaled hard core supporters' willingness to defend the President, even if there was a potential human cost. Yet, such fervent defensive mobilization was also their Achilles heel. Without another mission, participants abandoned the groups in 2003-2004 when Chávez faced a recall referendum (Hawkins, 2010). Since the Circles were heard, but mainly echoed chavista messages, they solidified a process of captured voice.

### *The Recall Referendum and Electoral Mobilization*

The objective of electoral mobilization completely consumed the Chávez government from mid-2003 to August 2004. Before the country's National Electoral Council (CNE) approved a citizens' petition calling for a recall referendum on Chávez's mandate in May 2004, public opinion polls reported Chávez's approval rating had reached an historic low of 31% in August, 2003 (Gil Yepes, 2011, 28). Despite the electoral authority's delayed approval of the recall petition—the CNE rejected as invalid the first bundle of signatures submitted late—it seemed opposition forces still had a good chance of recalling Chávez.<sup>62</sup>

In the meantime, changes in the global economy created favorable conditions for the government and Chávez capitalized. The average yearly price of Venezuelan oil escalated, from approximately 20\$ a barrel in late 2001 to 30\$ a barrel in 2003, and to 35\$ a barrel in 2004 (OPEC, [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/data\\_graphs/40.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/40.htm), accessed June 1, 2015). The influx of petrodollars provided fiscal flexibility for the government to target social spending through the so-called 'Social Missions.'

Launched by Chávez in March 2003, the Presidential Social Fund-sponsored 'Social Missions' had the objective of socioeconomic empowerment (Hawkins, 2010, 190). Of course, they contained political meanings, too. Programs such as the *Barrio Adentro* (Inside the Neighborhood) health program that placed Cuban doctors on barrio streets, the various education Missions, and the subsidized food Mission received popular acclaim in part because they featured community based service delivery. Missions featured a process of literally implanting temporary government offices on the blocks of neighborhoods—an apartment for a Cuban doctor, a community sourced teacher for the education programs, and food stands in plazas. Convenient

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<sup>62</sup> Two key thresholds needed to be met by the opposition. Initiating a recall referendum required obtaining signatures from 20% of the corresponding electorate. In the referendum vote, the Yes votes to recall the President needed to surpass (by 1) the number of votes received by the sitting President in their previous election.

access was key to the popularity of the Missions since many beneficiaries normally travelled great distances to hospitals, schools, and markets.

Some programs formally involved users committees, such as the health committees for *Barrio Adentro* (Monserrat, 2005; Briggs and Briggs, 2007). But group participation was not a prerequisite for receiving social assistance. Thus, though the Mission's benefit delivery mechanism of block-level policy execution implied institutions directly engaging society and fostering the perception neighborhood residents were also policy stakeholders, collective action was ancillary. Even missions entailing participation featured low-intensity collective action. For instance, a *Barrio Adentro* health committee's most strenuous activity was compiling a public health census—a significant undertaking, nonetheless.

The Missions directly aided pro-Chávez electoral mobilization. First, the styling of the programs as 'Social Missions' resonated with Chávez's framing of social problems as emergencies needing immediate responses. Moreover, they prominently featured leftist ideological symbolism consistent with Chavista discourse, and tended to be staffed by persons with pro-Chávez political profiles (Hawkins, 2010). Second, districts identified as pro-Chávez—using vote trends in the 2000 Presidential elections as a baseline—received more Mission benefits than non-chavista districts (Penfold, 2007). This clientelistic distribution, which, strictly speaking, entailed pork-barrel spending where benefits are distributed to loyal districts in early phases of an election cycle (Schaffer, 2007, 7-10), shaped electoral mobilization. In terms of their top-down and bottom-up dimensions, the Missions were very similar to most state-run social programs. They aided community development processes but, unlike the direct development authored by MTAs or CCs in 2005 and 2006, they were governmental programs injected with a small dosage of popular action from below.

August 15, 2004 70% of the electorate turned out to participate in the recall vote. The ‘No’ vote to reject the referendum initiative won 59%-40%. The stinging defeat sent the opposition into a tailspin.<sup>63</sup> Chavismo seemed poised to succeed in the upcoming regional elections in October 2004, the Legislative vote in 2005, and the 2006 Presidential election.

#### B) *Scale Change: ‘Leaping Forward’ to Coordinated Mobilization and Mass Distribution*

November 2004, three months removed from the August referendum victory, and a month after a strong performance from government candidates in elections for Governors and Mayors, Chávez announced his political project’s “*salto adelante*” (leap forward). According to Haiman El-Troudi, who wrote a government report charting this ‘leap,’ there would be a two-year “revolution within the revolution” (El-Troudi, 2005, 14). This would be marked by a “transitory phase that *establishes the bases* required for building revolutionary state processes of sociopolitical transformation”— e.g., the “installation of a socialist model” (Ibid).

Troudi’s report, The Leap Forward: A New Stage for the Bolivarian Revolution, is a significant point of reference because it synthesized, and built on, a 2004 speech Chávez made about the “Ten Strategic Objectives” for the government (Maingon and Sosa, 2007). The bulk of the report addresses three objectives on the domestic agenda: “creating a new social structure, accelerating the construction of a new democratic model for popular participation, and accelerating the creation of a new state institutional framework” (El-Troudi, 2005, 27-28). Three themes underpinned discussion of how to achieve objectives: 1) synchronization: “all projects should

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<sup>63</sup> Allegations of pro-Chávez fraud permitted by the electoral authority, the CNE, can be found in Hausmann and Rigobón, 2011, “In Search of the Black Swan: Analysis of the Statistical Evidence of Electoral Fraud in Venezuela,” Statistical Science, 2011, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 543-563. That paper, first published in 2004, generated substantial domestic and international media attention. The Carter Center’s 2005 report on the referendum addresses these allegations directly and provides an independent analysis of its own. It can be found at [www.cartercenter.org/documentos/2020.pdf](http://www.cartercenter.org/documentos/2020.pdf).

operate in synchrony with the strategic objectives;” 2) aligning state and society: “all community and government actions should be aligned with strategic goals;” and 3) centralizing efforts: “nothing should be done in isolation, whether the project is designed by government or the community” (El-Troudi, 2005, 21). In short, the ‘leap’ proposed a scale change on two levels: expanding the scope of government activity to broaden the political space and increasing the degree of policy coordination to enhance Executive power.

### *State and Societal Bases of a Revolutionary State*

This scale change became most visible through Chávez’s accumulation of decision-making powers. What is more, “establishing *bases*” for constructing a revolutionary state aided Chávez’s autocratic concentration of power. Establishing the bases consisted of changing the composition of the state workforce and promoting popular participation as the “transversal axis” of all government policy (El-Troudi, 2005, 77). First and foremost, changes to the state workforce consisted of overt politicization. The existence of “allies and opponents” in every public institution meant state officials needed to identify who “plays in favor and against the revolutionary process” (El-Troudi, 2005, 57). Second, and at the same, the plan rejected party membership as a criterion for state employment (Ibid, 84). It instead called for cultivating “techno-political professionals,” a “hybrid between the intellectual, the political and the manager” that is capable of “understanding that popular action transcends theories” (El-Troudi, 2005, 84). In practice, techno-political professionals were the officials who would expand their routine to include providing technical assistance to mobilized neighborhood groups and allocating distribution (Ibid, 87-88).

The report proposed ‘popular power’ as a new organizing concept to frame the relationship between state mobilization and barrio-based groups. El-Troudi argued “popular power” should

have two sources—top-level state institutions and bottom-level societal processes (El-Troudi, 2005, 79). In this vein, “building the foundations of popular power in every state, municipality, parish, and community signifies *promoting* participatory diagnoses of community needs, the participatory budget, social accountability, community-based local planning, supporting and helping community co-management, providing technical assistance and creating conditions for worker management structures, facilitating the construction of hundreds of thousands of base level social organizations” (El-Troudi, 2005, 79, my emphasis). El-Troudi describes these foundations and practices as force multipliers that strengthen existing institutional processes, such as the *Consejo Local de Planificación Pública* (Local Councils for Public Planning, CLPP), and nurture existing barrio groups, such as the *Mesa Técnicas de Agua* (Ibid).

### *Popular Voice and Popular Development*

The 2005 Leap Forward report envisions reforming, but not completely revising, the 1999 Constitutional framework. This institutional framework entailed decentralization processes of planning and participation, such as the CLPPs. For example, the report calls for creating “entities of popular participation (EPPs).” These vaguely defined government spaces would be filled by “*Communal Councils*” and other groups—e.g., MTAs, the Bolivarian Circles, and social movements—that should all coordinate activities with CLPPs (El Troudi, 2005, 79, my emphasis). The report’s reference to Communal Councils seemed to provide continuity to institutional processes. The 2002 Law creating the municipal level CLPPs directly mentions Communal Councils. The CLPPs consist of elected council members and have deliberative forums for citizen consultation on planning and capital works decision-making processes (González Marregot, 2005). Article 2 of the CLPP Law indicates that elected members of the CLPP are to maintain a

“permanent link with the networks of parish councils and communal councils, responding to their opinions and suggestions, as well as providing timely information about the activities of the CLPP” (Machado, 2009, 177). A second law, the June 2005 Organic Law for Municipal Public Power (LORM), further specifies the Councils’ link to Municipal governance. Article 112 of the LORM indicates that “the Parish and Communal Councils are administrative levels of the CLPPs and will have the role of serving as a principal center for the protagonist participation of the people in the formulation, execution, control, and evaluation of public policies, as well as to make viable the ideas and proposals that organized communities present before the CLPP” (Machado, 2009, 177).

Though these two laws did not specify the roles Councils should play, it is clear these institutional designs defined them as vehicles for strengthening popular voice. A practical problem impeded progress here, however. Few Mayors promoted Councils despite LORM’s Article 113 stipulating they do so (Machado, Ibid). Without institutional linkages to municipal governance, the Councils remained underdeveloped and highly malleable.

In mid to late 2005 President Chávez regularly referenced the Councils as examples of “social participation” (Machado, 2009, 177-178). The qualifier of ‘social’ marked a subtle but important shift in the President’s promotion of the Councils. The shift is captured by Chávez’s emphasis that Councils not only plan for their community and petition the state but also administer resources during direct project management (Garcia-Guadilla, 2008, 128). Assigning the Councils roles in production—the lead members received stipends and the Council sourced wage labor from within the community—fit within the broader pattern of Chávez’s consistent calls for the state to take advantage of popular sectors’ productive capacities (Chávez, *Aló Presidente*, 233, September 6, 2006, 48-49). Consider, for example, a justification Chávez offered for why a Council should directly receive state resources. During *Aló Presidente*—the President’s Sunday television show—



he cited the Urban Land Committees and the MTAs, which, as shown below, began receiving state funds for undertaking developmental projects a month before Chávez made these remarks. Noting the sequence of residents mobilizing a CTU or MTA group through fairly intensive steps of voluntary collective action (census, blueprint and plan in the case of the MTAs) before petitioning the state, Chávez said “first, organization, these groups move in this direction, then the resources so they can make a cadastral survey of the barrio, the map, and the official letterhead” (Chávez, *Aló Presidente*, 233, September 5, 2006, 48-49). In other words, Chávez argued these groups already perform the work of the state—planning and compiling information—so why hold them back them from working for development?

The idea of development as central to collective action sparked a debate over technocracy. The ‘School of Citizens,’ an NGO influenced by Tocqueville’s notions of civil society as a school for democracy, underscored a tradeoff between voice and development. They underlined the “dangerous tendency to define the Councils as simply planners and executors of public works, undermining their real potential to construct a new society and communal state” (Garcia-Guadilla, 2008, 138). This criticism makes a valid point. But, rather than schools for democracy, the Councils are more compellingly understood as vehicles for political incorporation. Thus, the institutional context is relevant for examining how state-society interactions facilitate Council members’ sense of civic competence and efficacy and for considering the limited degree of pluralism that narrows political incorporation pathways. The same insight can be applied for comprehending MTAs’ participation within the system.

### *C) Communal Councils: A Primary Hub for Community Development*

In his *Alo Presidente* broadcast February 5, 2006, Chávez issued a call for existing barrio groups to unite forces and integrate their collective action under the umbrella of the Communal Council. The Councils, said Chávez, “should be, among other things, like a gear around which the CTUs, the Health Committees, the MTAs turn freely but in a coordinated fashion” (Chávez, February 5, 2006, 67). Existing groups could continue to operate, he elaborated, but they could not “work in isolation” since things needed to be “articulated together” (Chávez, Ibid).

Chávez recognized the history of the Councils as organs linked to municipal governance through the CLPPs—Local Councils for Public Planning—but in the same breath redefined the groups. In fact, he issued a call to sever the link—“we cannot convert the Councils into appendices of Municipal administration” (Chávez, Ibid). To remedy what he described as the “error” of linking the Councils to municipal governance, Chávez proposed that the National Assembly draft a law exclusively for the Councils. The April 10, 2006 Organic Law on the Communal Councils (CCs) abolished an article in the Law on Municipal Power linking the Councils to CLPP consultation processes (Machado, 2009, 178). Instead, article 30 of the CC Law created a National Commission on Popular Power, a body named by the President. This established a direct vertical link between Chávez and Councils (Ibid). The Councils could receive funding from sources other than central government, although this was their chief source.<sup>64</sup> But the state agency FUNDACOMUNAL managed the crucial process of registration, the procedure through which a Council gained the formal recognition needed to receive such funds. State-financed foundations with explicit goals of promoting the government’s political project, such as the *Frente Francisco de Miranda* (Francisco de Miranda Brigade) and other quasi-partisan entities, helped promote the groups too. Although the Law defined the Councils as public entities, and some opposition administrations and the

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<sup>64</sup> The Councils were able to receive private donations as well as funds from local government and decentralized entities.

private sector later warmed to the idea of promoting them, the Councils became Chávez's primary hub for the government to distribute community development grants.

The Chávez government assigned the Councils political status by aligning community development with promotion of its political project. Chávez's pivotal post-reelection victory speech December 15, 2006 officially announced two momentous undertakings: building "Twenty First Century Bolivarian Socialism" and creating a socialist political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).<sup>65</sup> Other important announcements followed in early 2007. In January, Chávez outlined the five constituent drivers of the revolution, the catalysts for building socialism. These were: 1) the Enabling Law for Decree Power, 2) a Constitutional Reform, 3) Education with Socialist Values, 4) the New Geometry of Power (Territorial Reorganization), and 5) The Explosion of Popular Power—the Construction of a Protagonist, Participatory and Socialist Democracy (Chávez, January 17, 2007). Evidently, Chávez wanted all the parts of this motor to turn together. He formally swore into office the members of the Presidential commission for Constitutional Reform and the Presidential Commission for Popular Power—which included Santiago Arconada, who was on leave from Hidrocapital—at the same government event. Thus, popular development became intimately linked with the more ideological process of Councils serving as "fuel for the five constituent drivers... and the deepening of the Bolivarian Revolution in the path to Socialism" (Garcia-Guadilla, 2008, 125).

### *Communal Councils in Three Phases*

The Communal Councils entail three phases of activity: mobilizing a Council, receiving public authorization to operate in state-governed venues, and organizing the group in such a way that it could absorb funds and commence development work. Breaking down the Councils this

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<sup>65</sup> Chávez first publicly stated interest in pursuing a path to socialism at the January 2005 meeting of the Sao Paulo Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

way helps illustrate three elements—1) the level of collective action mobilizing a Council can entail, 2) their place in the political system, and 3) the challenges that Councils can face in developing working arrangements for popular development with the state. At the same time, illustrating the centrality of the Councils to the Chávez political project casts light on the major challenges their primacy posed to existing barrio groups.

### *Mobilization and Horizontal Voice*

In a pattern that closely resembled the process for forming a MTA, getting a Communal Council started often involved a few individuals with initiative. These individuals had the task of sparking residents to join together and assemble a Communal Council. If these individuals were not known leaders, they often became leaders while serving as the Council's chief promoters. These leaders stimulate neighborhood excitement and interest in the Council, working with state officials to disseminate the guidelines for organizing one. This initial mobilization can vary in intensity and duration. It can involve undertaking a community census of households to establish the population size (specified by the law as between 200 and 400 families) and of citizen concerns (to identify the relevant working thematic committees of water, security, education, etc.), drawing a community map to establish the boundaries and territorial scope of the Council (not pre-established by the law), holding information sessions about the Councils, and convening elections to select the provisional leadership that will oversee the Council's transition toward its founding elections, which requires participation from 20% of the population to be valid. Of these activities, the election of the provisional leadership is the minimum requirement.

Promoting the Council and holding founding elections are supposed to be separate activities, with the Promotion Committee's period of operation ending after convoking a

Constituent Community Assembly for the Founding Elections. But in practice those who show initiative often work on both committees, leading to the entwining of activities around a social grouping. Moreover, those who show initiative often want to continue doing so, and so they are likely to run for leadership posts on the three top committees: The Financial Management Unit that administers the Communal Bank (5 persons), the Executive Committee (3 principal persons) responsible for administration and holding meetings with spokespersons from thematic committees, and the Social Control Unit (3 principal persons).

The mobilizing phase—from arousing community interest to holding of a founding election—may require months of local meetings and entail frequent interactions with state officials. In this sense, the mobilization phase holds intrinsic value for tracking popular voice’s orientation. The mobilization of a Council involves few opportunities for “vertical voice,” addressing power holders at the top (O’Donnell, 1999, 65). But in providing opportunities for “the dispelling of isolation and mutual distrust” among residents (Hirschman, 1984, 56), the Councils created episodes for cultivating horizontal voice—the mutual addressing of one another as a “we” that can be constitutive of a “collective identity” formed around ideals and material interests (O’Donnell, 1999, 65-66). Although mobilizing a Communal Council can be a burdensome undertaking, it represents a significant achievement on its own.

### *State Certification*

Once the pieces of the Council are in place, it still needs formal state recognition to become operational. Throughout the mobilizing phase, the leaders who showed initiative are likely to have established lines of communication with state officials. That contact needs to be formalized through FUNDACOMUNAL, the state agency vested with the legal authority to officially register

the Councils. Registration entails reviewing the Council's paperwork and validating its election. If FUNDACOMUNAL confers registered status on the Council, then the group receives a seal to notarize paperwork, an important step since this allows the Executive Committee to sign letters of residence for employment applications and to give other Council business official imprimatur. FUNDACOMUNAL is an agency of the Ministry of Participation and Social Protection, and thus is under the control of the central state. Councils located in opposition territory - whether in opposition governed spaces or in opposition strongholds within Chavista-governed spaces - complained of inexplicable delays from FUNDACOMUNAL (Centro Gumilla, 2008). The institution earned a universally perceived reputation for opacity when it came to the approval process for registering Councils.

*Narrowing Pluralism: Arranging Popular Development, Assigning Political Status*

Once formally registered, a Council can solicit community development funds from all levels of government, elected or unelected, as well as from private sector sources. FUNDACOMUNAL also had a department in which officials reviewed the technical feasibility of proposed projects. FUNDACOMUNAL's declaration that a project was feasible made it easier for a Council to acquire project funds, but its rejection of a project proposal was not a final veto. Councils could contact other government agencies for technical approval. Chávez's nationwide promotion of the Councils as part and parcel of the explosion of 'popular power' elicited a sense of urgency from government agencies. National and sub-national institutional leaders wanted to demonstrate their alignment with the President's policy agenda. Moreover, private foundations were eligible to make contributions to the Councils through development grants. As a result,

Councils, once recognized by the state, had multiple venues where they could solicit funding. Yet, equal opportunities did not abound.

Arranging opportunities for popular development involved state officials making judgments based on the political status of groups. For example, the MTAs and CTU (Urban Land Committee) had political status that predated the Councils. The government's branding of them as Bolivarian validated their political status, which in turn made it extremely likely for participants to be pro-Chávez. These groups already had relationships with officials in the water and urban development bureaucracies. However, popular associations that emerged thanks in part to government-created opportunities, but framed their collective action as autonomous forms of civil society, lacked political status. With state officials instructed to prioritize the Councils, technical assistance shifted away from popular associations unwilling to conform to the Council model. This implied the government's strong disapproval of a civil society framework, a trend that signaled the lack of pluralism in state-society relations and that undermined chances for popular sector representation.

Finally, only a modicum of pluralism existed within the arena of Communal Councils. Preferential treatment of Communal Councils affiliated with *chavismo*—resulting either from ties Council leaders had previously cultivated with state officials or from state targeting of these districts—was evident both in formal registration of Councils and in provision of financing to them. Some Communal Councils whose leaders had either an independent or pro-opposition profile did receive formal registration and funds. But, with the government assigning the Councils a clearly political role, as in Chávez's call in 2007 for them to promote his Constitutional reform, non-chavistas' level of interest in forming a Council decreased (Hawkins, 2010). By and large this limited Council-based political incorporation opportunities to pro-government populations.

### *Encompassing Development and Voice*

The Councils seems to imply rapid, unidirectional change. To be sure, two years of energetic promotion yielded impressive results. By mid-2007 the Ministry of Participation and Social Protection reported a population of 16,000 CCs (Garcia-Guadilla, 2008, 126). The Councils surpassed previous state sponsored groups in terms of scope of activity and intensity of collective action. For example, the sizable populations of 2700 *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Committees, MTA) and 6,000 *Comités de Tierra Urbana* (Urban Land Committees (CTUs) (Goldfrank, 2011b, 177) entailed thematic activities pertaining to water and land tenure issues while the Councils proposed integrating these themes, and others, under the umbrella of a territorially organized governance unit. Furthermore, the Councils indicated greater coordination of collective action, suggesting an effort to routinize mobilization.

One interpretation held that, beginning in 2005, and then more definitively in 2006 and 2007, the “kaleidoscope” landscape of “fluid, heterogeneous and decentralized grassroots organization” (Roberts, 2006, 143) trended toward a monochromatic landscape marked by stability, homogeneity, and centralization (Lander, 2007). The metaphor of a homogenous organizational landscape captures trends at their broadest level. It is also important, I have argued, to examine interactions between embedded processes and policy events, as this provided insight into what forms of collective action existed within different Councils. In short, the Councils were hard to classify in terms of either development or voice because they moved to center stage within a transitional juncture marked by the existence of policy events advancing popular development and popular voice.

## II. Issuing Guiding Principles for Action: Chávez at the Third Water Congress



Under Chávez, almost all policy domains were subject to the President's micro-managing tendencies. In other words, Chávez left a personal mark on policy matters because he played an outsized role in formulating and articulating policy goals. Thus, beyond the extensive powers vested in him by Venezuela's highly Presidentialist system, the specific style of leadership had important implications for how government operated.

For example, government officials not only followed Chávez's lead when it came to promoting policy measures. They had to digest the President's message so they could assimilate this information into their operational procedures. Consequently, processes with national scope almost invariably began with Chávez articulating a framework and setting the tone for its implementation. Chávez's chairing of the III Congress on Community Water Experiences is a case in point of his leadership setting into place four guiding principles for action regarding popular development. The event was a rehearsal in the sense that MTAs were the first groups to follow the pattern of unregulated development that characterized the Communal Councils on a national basis.

### *The Third Water Congress: A Birthday for Chávez and the MTAs*

On July 30, 2005 a packed crowd filled the seats of the Caracas Municipal Theater. Red shirt-clad government officials and white t-shirt-clad *Mesas Técnica de Agua* (MTAs) leaders were in a festive mood as they awaited President Chávez's arrival at the III National Water Congress hosted by Hidroven.<sup>66</sup> When Chávez entered the Theater, chants of "*uh ah, Chávez no se va*" (hey, hey, Chávez is not going to leave!) rang out as the President sauntered up to the main stage. Then, the audience serenaded Chávez with Happy Birthday—the President turned fifty-one years old two

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<sup>66</sup> Red became the political color of Chávez's party.

days before. After bowing to show appreciation, Chávez gestured for the crowd to settle in, and the President took his seat at the center of the dais.

Around Chávez sat members of his cabinet. The group included Jacqueline Faria, the Minister of the Environment and the first Hidrocapital President (1999-2003), and Julio Montes, the Minister of Housing and Habitat and a key supporter of the initial *Mesas de Agua* while serving on the Municipal Services Commission during the LCR's Governing from the Parish experience (1992-1995). Cristóbal Francisco Ortiz, the President of Hidroven, opened the proceedings explaining how the Congress would mark the start of a new phase of Community Management Policy programs: the inauguration of a Financing Fund for Community Water Projects created thanks to a transfer of funds from an urban development program managed by Montes at the Ministry of Housing and Habitat. MTAs would administer project funds while directly managing these community water projects—essentially the same format as Councils.

As the main event of the Congress, ten MTA representatives delivered ten-minute presentations about the nature of the water service problems they faced, the origins of their project proposals, and an explanation for why the project was urgent and feasible. Presenters used an easel to display photos and a lecturing pointer to direct the audiences' attention. State media recorded the session, but there was no live feed. An emcee introduced the presenters and the title of the project but, notably, no official provided information about the selection process through which the MTAs present had received approval for their projects. Attention eventually shifted to MTA representatives' interactions with the audience's most important member, President Chávez.

Chávez had no formal speaking role on the event's agenda but, of course, listening was not the motive. Impromptu interactions between the President and these supporters developed when

Chávez interrupted MTA representatives' presentations. He asked questions and then turned these exchanges into conversations about broader issues.

Following the sequence of Chávez's interventions, the President outlined four principles for action regarding how state officials should proceed while facilitating MTA groups' project administration: 1) without delay, devolve the resources and responsibilities to the people; 2) allow the MTAs to manage the execution of the projects independently and flexibly; 3) discourage bossism—individual MTA leaders concentrating power in their hands—but do not let the challenges of leadership and decision-making impede progress; 4) 'this' program 'cannot fail.'

The last priority Chávez underscored—'this cannot fail'—held the most weight. The audience of state officials that would subsequently oversee project supervision attended the Congress because it was their job to do so. They needed to operationalize Chávez's interventions to develop a practical procedure for interacting with MTAs during project implementation. In this sense, 'this cannot fail' operated as the fundamental principal from which oversight behavior should flow. This was not exactly an example of the state trying to pick winners. Rather, it was an example of ensuring conditions for project implementation to produce signs of success. The terms of success were not clearly defined. But, from Chávez's perspective, having MTAs receive the state funds and commence project work as soon as possible constituted positive developments. Thus, a) the 'this cannot fail' premise implied subsidiary principles of action: a) directly devolving the resources and responsibilities to the people; b) fostering an environment ripe for independent and flexible project management; and c) discouraging individual leaders of MTAs from concentrating power in their hands but not letting this challenge impede immediate results.

#### A) *'This cannot fail'*

Chávez made the remark ‘this cannot fail’ during the presentation of Mr. Carasquel, an older peasant who lived in a tenement shack in the rural plains state of Guarico. Chávez seemed frustrated by his government’s failure to improve this man’s life. Pointedly, Carasquel had even said, “if we had the money, then I would not be here and the problem would already have been solved” (Carrasquel, July 30, 2005). Carasquel seemed to strike Chávez as symbolizing the humble, hardworking personality that would ignite interest in community service work. Chávez set a deadline for results in Carasquel’s town in Guarico, and then explained the importance of rapid results.

I want to “visit communities to inaugurate the new water service networks that are completed within one year’s time” (Chávez, July 30, 2005). The roar in the crowd, which emerged as a reaction to perceiving Chávez’s confidence in the MTAs capacity to make progress efficiently, turned to silence as Chávez’s visage changed to a serious look.

This [the community projects] is so important it cannot fail. Because we are taking the first steps. From the success of these first steps, upon this first seeding, depends the future. Where we make a mistake, we make a mistake, and we will make the correction as we go along. We should have a grand success before this year ends (Chávez, July 30, 2005).

Chávez stressed the point further. Results needed to emerge now because MTA participation was a strategic plank of his political project for “communal government” (Chávez, July 30, 2005). This was one of the first times he used this term before projecting it, at the front and center of political discourse, under the idea of “*poder popular*” (popular power, Chávez, July 30, 2005). To punctuate the connection between the MTAs communal participation and the government’s future trajectory, he said “Participation—it has to be multiplied—that is where the necessary firepower (*por allí van los tiros*) for winning the revolution lies, the participation of the people” (Chávez, July 30, 2005). Chávez completed his intervention with Carasquel by praising the MTAs as the “first cells” of a

communal government in which such groups would eventually become “*empresas de producción social*” (social production companies).

*B) Directly to the people: “When does the money arrive to these people?”*

The issue of immediately devolving resources to MTAs came to the fore when Chávez asked a blunt question. ‘When are they going to give you this money for the project?’ thundered the **President Chávez** while interrupting the *Mesa Técnica de Agua ‘La Pedrera’* Spokesperson, **Yunelly Ortega**.<sup>67</sup> “Well, when you, sir, make it available” retorted Ortega, grinning from ear-to-ear. The quick retort from Ortega lightened the mood. The crowd laughed while Chávez thumbed through papers in front of him. **President Chávez said**: “Ah, but this money already exists. I approved this not long ago. Who has it? Where is it right now?” He paused, someone whispered in his ear, and then answered, “Ah, Julio Montes has it.”

The camera turned toward Montes. “Yes, Mr. President. These resources are in the fund ‘for the transformation of the barrios’ in the Venezuelan Petroleum Corporation (La C.V.P., a subsidiary of state oil company P.D.V.S.A.)—they come from the pool of petroleum incomes to the state. There is an agreement between CVP and Hidroven (National Water Superintendent)—those resources are available now,” Minister of Housing and Habitat **Julio Montes** noted. The camera zoomed backed in on Chávez. “1.250 trillion Bolivares for the transformation of the barrios—correct,” reiterated **Chávez** before staring out to the audience as if he was unsatisfied with something in Montes’s clarification. Filling the silence, **Montes** continued: “This amount—

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<sup>67</sup> This conversation contains direct quotations, some paraphrasing, and observations from watching a recording of the Third National Congress of Community Experiences in Potable Water and Sanitation, President Chávez’s Plenary Session featuring MTA Spokespersons’ Project Presentations, Caracas Municipal Theater, July 30, 2005, Live State Broadcast Video.

1.250—includes both the fund for the substitution of homes for *ranchos* (tenements) program and 550 as the initial fund for the transformation of the barrios program” (Ibid).<sup>68</sup> Until then no official had publicly explained the genesis of the Hidroven Financing Fund. Now the events behind its creation were a bit clearer: Chávez created a general account for promoting urban development, and Montes partnered with Hidroven to allocate water-specific spending.

**Chávez:** “We’ll have to pay attention to the speed with which these resources flow; because this is another problem with ‘*the bureaucracy*.’ So let me ask the question again: *when does the money arrive to these people?*” (Chávez accentuated by pronouncing bur-eau-a-cracy slowly.) Now the burden was really on the state officials in attendance. P.D.V.S.A. Board of Director Representative **Eulogio de Pino** chimed in: “Yesterday, we signed yesterday with Hidroven.” Still, Chávez wanted to make another linkage.

President of Hidroven, **Cristóbal Francisco Ortiz** fleshed out the applied side of the transfer. “42.5 billion—an inter-institutional agreement to be administered by regional utilities and the communities,” and, most importantly, “the communities will oversee the projects by way of signatures on the contracts,” Ortiz explained.<sup>69</sup> Looking more pleased, **Chávez** put a finishing touch on the discussion while looking out to the audience: “War to the death against corruption and inefficiency. We should all be vigilant so that not one of the *bolívaes* we have assigned to

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<sup>68</sup> Montes worked on a pilot project called the Project for the Physical Habilitation of the Barrios, begun in 2000 by then Housing Minister Josefina Baldó. That project proposed a structural urbanization process within barrios. Instead of relocating barrio residents to high rise public housing, for example, the plan called for making investments to improve public services in barrio neighborhoods. That plan, first outlined in the 1990s by architects Baldó and Federico Villanueva, received initial backing from the Chávez government but support did not endure.

<sup>69</sup> In a separate exchange, Chávez paused a conversation with a presenter to place a phone call to Central Bank President Nelson Merentes. He may have done this on-stage and in front of the audience as a continuation of his response to Carasquel or Ortega about the speed of his government team’s reaction to public service problems. Literally, Chávez asked for one of his staff to call Merentes, saying “since it is my birthday, I want a gift,” while they dialed him. Chávez then spoke directly to Merentes on the phone, not on speaker function, all along keeping the audience informed that the Central Bank President was approving his then and there request for funding that would trigger twenty or more community projects.

give power to the people gets lost—‘*Poder al pueblo*.’ Like the Constitution says, a social state of rule of law and justice, a government shared with a community government, and, like the strategy we have explained over and over, if we want to end poverty, it is necessary to give power to the poor, knowledge power, technical power, organizational power, moral power! Continue, Yunelly, your presentation [of MTA La Pedrera’s project] has been so lucid!”

Chávez’s exchange with Ortega split the audience into bureaucratic and societal publics, and hinted at the President’s strong inclination to favor the MTAs when it came to two concrete issues. First, Chávez had predetermined who should be blamed if projects funds were not dispensed quickly. Counseling MTA members to be vigilant about how long it takes for state institutions to allocate public resources for projects had an obvious upshot. It insinuated that slow or non-responsive agency behavior would be symptomatic of a calcified bureaucratic system (Chávez, July 30, 2005; Ellner and Hellinger, 2003). Second, Chávez’s insistence that his senior administrators wage war against waste and graft, was about who would receive the benefit of the doubt as the likely perpetrator of corruption. Chávez wanted funds funneled down to the community groups as quickly as possible. Moreover, he warned MTAs that mid-level managers, the class of agents chavistas identify as the “*derecha endogena*” (endogenous right-wing), have a tendency to drag their feet or undercut government through corruption and sabotage.

Details such as the speed with which the money will be transferred may seem like topics President dispense subordinates to deal with. Nevertheless, effectively defining policy objectives and offering guidelines in clear and cogent terms required some focus on details since these were integral to operational processes.<sup>70</sup> The emphasis on action, brought into relief clearly by Chávez’s

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<sup>70</sup> Chávez had experience with money he approved getting lost in the bureaucracy before reaching its intended destination in society. The issue arose in a somewhat awkward exchange between a CTU leader and Chávez at the CTU Congress. The CTU leader spoke about her proposed project for rehabilitating over one hundred houses,

blunt opening question, *when* will the resources be transferred, sent a strong signal to both the state and societal actors present: take immediately consequential steps to make results appear. At the same time, Chávez's orders meant MTA representatives had some leverage with state administrators. If resources arrived later than anticipated, MTA leaders could cite Chávez's warning that 'where there is smoke, there is fire'—i.e., slow state responses equaled corrupt behavior.

### *C. Fostering Independent and Flexible Management of Projects*

Chávez raised the third point, fostering an environment ripe for independent and flexible management of projects, while praising MTA members. Their involvement in "shared management" with the state placed groups in the vanguard. "We are initiating, launching a new phase—we are trying out methods, inventing models, in this case, specifically, with the administration of resources" (Chávez, August 15, 2005). We will be doing it "in a co-managed manner, co-management, shared management, this comes from the planning, which is shared too, and likewise goes all the way to the execution of the Project, between the organized community, what you in the MTAs represent, and the government and its functionaries, its organizations, its institutions." This co-management - "it is a strategic alliance" (Chávez, July 30, 2005).

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overhauling a dilapidated public plaza, and building a chain of food stands to sell locally made sweets. Then she noted that she was not sure whether the resources for the project still existed because the Minister who approved the funding, Housing and Habitat Minister Julio Montes, no longer held his position. She had heard, she said, that a fusion of offices formerly under Montes's control meant the resources were not accessible. Chávez did not have all the information to rebut this claim but instead suggested that the resignation and streamlining of the offices was for the better. In any case, he noted, this event today was about assigning the resources for this very project. At this point the CTU leader could no longer protest the point since the matter was beyond Chávez. But, clearly, something was not right. Chávez thought this project was getting funding that day, but he seemed to have wrong information. "By all means," he said, "it will be necessary to have a look, Ministers Figueora and Iglesias" to be sure where this money is located and when the CTU leader's community will receive it (Chávez, I National CTU Congress, August 30, 2005, Partial Transcript from Alejandro Velasco, page 6).



With regards to the administration of resources, for example, Chávez pointed out that MTAs would purchase building materials at the shops of their choosing (Chávez, July 30, 2005, Hitcher, 2005, III Congress of the MTAs, Caracas). Some limits existed. The President of Hidrocapital, Alejandro Hitcher, was called on to respond to Chávez's questioning about whether an MTA needed approval from above to make purchases in the course of acquiring materials—e.g., pipes and machinery. Hitcher's response mixed up the sequence. He first stated that Hidrocapital would make bulk purchases of large sized tubes (greater than 2') direct from the factories. Realizing his comment suggested MTAs input had a secondary status, Hitcher qualified, pointing out Hidrocapital would only make such purchases after receiving authorization from the MTA (Hitcher, July 30, 2005).

Chávez also stressed the need for flexibility in the implementation of this new method. He made this comment while reiterating that co-management represented a recently invented effort to reform governance and establish new foundations (Chávez, July 30, 2005). He cited examples of what flexible methods of collaboration could entail within contexts of coproduction. Chávez appealed to general sensibilities among this marginalized population by encouraging MTAs to consider community-based work teams—'I am sure there are capable hands in these communities,' he noted—and cooperating over the shared use of machinery as a more frugal and fruitful manner for executing projects. "Instead of renting [machinery or tools], we use what we have," he reasoned, pointing out that if cooperation was realized effectively, surplus resources could be used for community reinvestments (Chávez, July 30, 2005).

Chávez alternated between describing MTA activities under "shared management" as *trabajo voluntario* (volunteer work) and as *trabajo ad-honorem* (honorary work). Significantly, the latter can imply stipends or fees, and in this sense, Chávez's use of both terms left the issue of

compensation open to interpretation. Meanwhile, Faria maintained these MTA activities would represent little more than a slightly formalized amplification of the self-help construction and repair undertaken on any weekend (Chávez, July 30, 2005, Caracas; Faria, July 30, 2005, Caracas Hidrocapital, 2005). Not imposing a rigid set of rules, recognizing that these actors already knew what to do, and restricting the state's role to facilitating, implied an effort to express confidence that MTAs had experience in this line of work.

In this way, Chávez was arguing that co-management would not require the MTAs to change their standard ways of performing community service. The only difference now, and it was a big one in his eyes, was cutting out intermediating contractors. That way the community organizations would be receiving more responsibilities and liaising directly with the state. This direct relationship was more respectful of the MTAs since it presumed that community members had the first right to be consulted on matters pertaining to service projects.

#### *D. Discourage but do not stop Bossism and its corrosive effects*

During one of the final presentations, the issue of tensions between leadership and collective participation came up. Chávez asked whether the representative of MTA 'La 70,' Romer Acosta, performed dual participatory roles as the "the *Mesa Técnica de Agua*" and "the *Comite de Tierra Urbana*" (Urban Land Committee, CTU). Chávez made the inquiry using the practically-oriented local vernacular, "*tu eres el CTU también?* (are you the CTU as well)?" This phrasing is a colloquial phrasing often used to determine the actual group leader. It condenses a very significant point by asking: are you the organization?

Acosta, who was not the first presenter to give the impression he held dual leadership roles, nodded his head yes. Chávez lightly chided Acosta and then implored: "opportunities for all to participate must be given" (Chávez, July 30, 2005). But Chávez did not belabor the point and the

chiding and encouragement of creating opportunities for all to participate did not constitute a real critique. More than anything else, the exchange unintentionally highlighted realities of leadership and the limits of participation's horizontality and breadth. Chávez did not ignore these potential tensions in community participation, in particular the possibility of quarreling over resources. But, he also gave no indication that there would be consequences for those who accumulate undue amounts of power.

### III. Codifying Chávez: Procedures for Non-Regulation

Though the plenary session mostly featured Chávez directly interacting with the individual MTA leaders who would lead project implementation, these exchanges were multilateral. Arguably, they held greater significance for the other important sector of the audience: the senior, middle, and lower-level officials indirectly and directly involved in overseeing project implementation. Given Chávez's influence, senior policymakers likely had little choice but to elaborate a kind of *lassiez-faire* system for regulating projects. Content analysis of inter-institutional correspondences sheds light on how officials justified, and elaborated a framework for a *laissez-faire* system of community development that avoided interfering at the cost of tolerating abuses.

Two documents paint a picture of a loose regulatory framework for coproduction in the water sector. The first is a July 29, 2005 inter-institutional financing agreement between the CVP (Venezuelan Petroleum Corporation, a subsidiary of P.D.V.S.A.) and Hidroven (Parent Company of the regional water utilities) that underwrote the Financing Fund. It illustrates how officials in the oil sector placed responsibility for overseeing quality of these projects on the shoulders of the water sector. The second, an August 31, 2005-October 2005 exchange of letters between the

President of Hidroven, Cristóbal Francisco Ortiz, and the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic (‘Corruption Czar’), addresses the robustness of the framework Hidroven should use to monitor MTA administration of public funds.<sup>71</sup> They reveal a process of passing oversight responsibility down the chain so that responsibilities were so dispersed no one in particular assumed the responsibility to oversee project fund management.

### *Whose Responsibility?*

When Jacqueline Faria (Minister of the Environment), Cristóbal Francisco Ortiz (President, Hidroven), and Julio Montes (Minister of Housing and Habitat) joined President Chávez on the Caracas Municipal Theater stage to inaugurate the Hidroven ‘Financing Fund for Community Projects,’ they thought they were launching the first of two major proposals for improving urban development proposals. Before the CVP transferred 42.5 Billion *Bolivares* to Hidroven on July 29, 2005 to start the Financing Fund, Julio Montes, the Minister of Housing and Habitat, came to an agreement on July 7, 2005 with President Chávez about financing urban development (Hidroven, 2005). However, less than a month after the III Water Congress, Montes resigned. But Ortiz and Farias remained ministers and the government did not close down the Hidroven Financing Fund despite Montes’s departure.

The inter-institutional agreement CVP signed with Hidroven leaves the distinct impression that officials there wanted to carry out Chávez’s mission of “socializing the oil” but they also felt concerned about liability issues (Rosenberg, 2007). The agreement defines the class of community projects as “*programas no reproductivas*” (non-productive programs). This classification implies beneficiaries do not have the responsibility to provide a counterpart investment or reimburse the

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<sup>71</sup> Only the month of the return letter from the Corruption Czar is clear. The date in October is not.

state (C.V.P.-Hidroven, 2005). Moreover, the agreement delegated oversight responsibility to the water utilities that would form direct partnerships with the community MTAs. In delegating the project oversight responsibilities to Hidroven, the agreement stipulates that it bears no responsibility for managing the persons who undertake construction, the quality of their construction project, the terms of contracts Hidroven and the MTAs establish, or for any ‘unjustified delay’ in the conclusion of the projects (C.V.P.-Hidroven 2005, Point 17). C.V.P. does call on Hidroven to provide regular progress reports to the company or to the Minister of Habitat’s office. These requests for responsiveness, however, seem perfunctory; they do not counter the dominant subtext that CVP officials outsourced oversight responsibility.

Thus the agreement passed regulatory responsibility to Hidroven, which was a co-recipient of funds and the Financing Fund's administrator. Given that the CVP was in effect donating this money and, on Chávez’s orders, not asking anything in return, it made sense to try and pass the responsibilities for oversight to another institution. CVP officials would certainly take credit for projects if Chávez wanted them to but they also wanted to avoid the potential for blowback if projects failed. This created a classic problem: no one seemed to be playing with “their own money,” in which they would face losses, and everyone seemed to be playing with ‘the house’s’ money,’ in which they would only face gains (Weyland, 2009).<sup>72</sup>

After all, a Chávez-created discretionary spending account for urban development created the Financing Fund. This fiscal structure did not specify mechanisms for PDVSA to hold Hidroven

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<sup>72</sup> After all, if anyone in Venezuela did in fact produce those fiscal resources, which, technically, are generated externally through petroleum export contracts set on international market prices, then officials at P.D.V.S.A. deserve the credit. They pursue the nation-state’s collective interest of generating revenue for the economy through their experts negotiating petroleum export contracts, collaborating with OPEC nations to set production quotas, and striking the complex financing deals with foreign majors participating in the Venezuelan oil sector (Tugwell, 1975). By comparison, neither Hidroven, through its subsidiaries meager collections of tariff revenues, nor ordinary citizens like those lead MTAs, made appreciable financial contributions to the fiscal pot or, for that matter, to the production of these fiscal rents.

accountable for managing the resources frugally. Hidroven received the funds as a one-time, presidentially-authorized donation. The agency had not raised the funds or lobbied Congress for them to be included in the congressional budget. True, Hidroven had an organizational self-interest in successful projects implementation. But transparent project administration was not one of the priorities Chávez underscored at the III Water Congress. From the top down, then, the matter of accounting for the efficient use of these resources was passed on to the subordinate without spelling out the consequences for actors if they engaged in ill-conceived use of these funds. With each layer of government shifting their responsibility to another, no center of accountability existed. In this context, why would the water utilities develop stiff regulations regarding MTAs' administration of project funds?

### *Shunning Third Party Enforcement, Relieving Concerns about Debt*

One high level official's behavior suggests he at least felt the heat of the spotlight. After the III Congress event, Hidroven President Francisco Ortiz, wrote a letter to the Corruption Czar's office, seeking advice and consent on how to proceed regarding regulation of MTAs as they managed state funds during project administration. Ortiz's letter provides a window into how far he, and by extension the water policy team, were willing to go on the issue of actually monitoring project administration. He strongly hints at the answer being sought by underscoring Chávez's declaration that "communities should handle the money for the execution of the projects" (Francisco Ortiz, August 31, 2005).

To develop a method of partnership that would make good on Chávez's promise and permit the right amount of oversight, Ortiz suggested signed and notarized direct 'Cooperation Agreements' between regional utilities and community elected leaders. The leaders would be

selected through community elections and they possessed Constitutional legitimacy because Article 70 of the Constitution specifies that “citizen service organs, self-management, co-management, cooperatives in all forms,... and other forms of association guided by the value of mutual cooperation and solidarity” are “sovereign” forms of participation (CBR, 1999, Article 70). Thus, Ortiz pointed out the binding nature of decisions taken at Assembly of Citizen meetings. He claimed that the deliberations of these meetings could be understood as examples of citizens exercising popular sovereignty, and that therefore they serve as a suitable means for designating legitimate MTA leaders. These leaders would then become accountable for project administration by dint of having signed a “Cooperation Agreement” and thereby be understood as agreeing to be “invested with public functions”—language he copied directly from an attached copy of article 3 of the Law Against Corruption (Francisco Ortiz, 2005, August 31, 2005, *La Ley Contra la Corrupción*, 2003). In describing the MTA leaders as quasi-public administrators, Ortiz stated that “Cooperation Agreements” would contain a clause classifying the consenting parties as “natural persons” subject to the responsibilities of the Corruption Law once they received an advance payment equal to fifteen percent of the total project cost (Francisco Ortiz, August 31, 2005). Further, the consenting parties were to be made aware of these circumstances when signing Cooperation Agreements for receiving the fifteen percent advance of project funds.

Ortiz informed the Corruption Czar’s office he selected the “cooperation agreement” framework over two alternatives. Transferring the funds as if they were charitable donations, he claimed, would have been unjustified. This method would have totally eliminated the transactional nature of the projects, which, he pointed out, consist of public construction works that “belong to the state” and therefore warrant some form of reciprocal contribution (Ortiz, August 21, 2005). Regarding a second option of making the grants akin to loan, a possibility according the *Ley de*

*la Contraloria General de la Republica,*’ Ortiz argued the guarantees that were too demanding because they ultimately placed too great a burden on citizens. The legislation contained clauses calling for levying sizable fines on individuals found complicit in administrative irregularities (Ibid). Ortiz deemed the population of MTA leaders ill equipped for such an eventuality. Most signing parties, he noted, have irregular incomes and lack access to credit. After laying out this context, Ortiz argued that these Cooperation Agreements would advance the cause of social justice, citing the President’s overall argument for coproduction: “in order to end poverty we need to give power to the poor” (Francisco Ortiz, August 31, 2005). Requesting that his water bureaucracy have sole responsibility for regulating MTAs’ behavior and arguing that leaders of MTA should not be subjected to the possibility of having debts to repay, Ortiz outlined a *laissez-faire* approach to monitoring MTA management of public funds.

In an October response to Ortiz, the deputy Corruption Czar summarized the contents of the letter from Hidroven. But the Corruption Czar pointed to a different Constitutional article to affirm the proposal of a bilateral Cooperation Agreement framework that would obviate third-party involvement and avert the possibility of MTA leaders accruing debt. The letter referenced the original funding agreement struck between President Chávez and Minister Montes for bolstering urban development, and pointed out that Article 82 stipulated disadvantaged actors’ privileged access to subsidies for housing services. Hygienic housing with basic public services, the article states, is a right while “meeting this requirement is the shared responsibility of citizens and the State in all areas” that should be given priority for those of “meager resources” (CBR, 1999, Article 82). For this reason, the Corruption Czar’s office wrote, water services constituted “an obligation shared between citizens and the state in their distinct arenas” and therefore water service projects should be “jointly managed by the state and the community” (Hernandez Negrette,



CGR, 2005). In effect, this meant that while state institutions had a responsibility to expand service for the poor, they did not have extensive jurisdiction to interfere in the management of services.

In its response, the CGR response emphasized that beyond holding Assemblies of Citizens, concrete organizations also needed to exist. It made no difference if these were the MTAs described in the LOPSAPS — the Organic Law on Potable Water and Sanitation Services (2001) or other kinds of organized group, such as Cooperatives, community companies or other registered neighborhood groups (Ibid). Beyond making this distinction, the CGR called for Hidroven to elaborate more specific norms regarding material procurement and accounting. Most importantly, though, the CGR did not call for a more robust structure of regulation. In effect, it both concurred with the framework of a direct partnership between Hidroven and MTAs and accepted the premise that actors of this socio-economic background should not, under any circumstances, suffer negative economic consequences from taking leadership responsibilities as project administrators (Hernandez Negrette, CGR, 2005).

As with the CVP-Hidroven financing agreement, murkiness surrounded the issue of what would happen if MTAs failed to administer funds successfully. What were the consequences? At the very least, the silence in these documents about these questions suggests great hesitation about adopting a clear posture on thorny issues. Perhaps officials did not want to appear cynical or skeptical about the prospects of this new initiative.

### Conclusion: Mobilization in Time and from Mobilization to Organization

To characterize the effects of Chávez's leadership on popular mobilization this chapter conceptualized the relationship between a combative president and base-level participation. First, to map popular mobilization from 2000-2006 I emphasized interactions between embedded

processes and policy events involving popular mobilization. This helped to envision mobilization first in terms of processes of popular development and popular voice and then trace how empirical trends moved along these two tracks. The Chávez-authored policy events provided the pivot points for examining change—i.e., how these processes strengthened or weakened through different collective action forms and organizational practices.

At the heart of this approach is an effort to situate process and event in dialogue with one another. This self-conscious attempt to place these elements in dialogue brings into focus an ontological question. How should accounts capture the interplay between process and events? I have attempted to construct a narrative in which mobilization is a evolutionary phenomenon. The evolutionary nature of mobilization had to do not only with the changing names of the organizations and the passing of laws, but also - especially - with the fact that configurations of development and voice shifted over time. Organizations that faded left legacies concerning the relative intensities of participation as a development or voice-based process. The legacies contributed to the strengthening or weakening of popular development and voice while events reconstituted their meanings in light of political contestation at the top.

For example, after 2005, when the channels for distribution through groups opened, popular development came to mean deploying state funding through communal organizations rather than strictly self-help strategies. At the same moment, the intensification of community development processes shaped popular voice into a process of horizontal voice. Participants had few good opportunities to express vertical voice toward the state because they had prior concerns regarding maintaining the relationship through which they received development assistance. A similar trajectory of feedback loops between process and events can be mapped with regards to the effects of the policy events concerning Chávez's politicization of the Councils.

What do we gain by putting the interplay of processes and events at the center of the analysis, and following a developmental account that captures evolutions in mobilization? What insights does an evolutionary approach provide that others do not? To consider the distinctive insights offered by a developmental account of mobilization, it is useful to briefly review Hawkins's study of populist organization, a key part of his overall argument about chavismo's populism as a "populist worldview, or a Manichaeian outlook that identifies Good with a unified will of the people and Evil with a conspiring minority, and they convey this set of ideas with a characteristic language— a discourse— full of bellicose, moralizing rhetoric emphasizing the recent subversion of the political system" (Hawkins, 2010, 29).

Hawkins offers a detailed account of one organization—the Revolutionary Bolivarian Circles (CBRs). Hawkins proposes that CBRs experienced a dramatic decline because they exhibited low levels of institutionalization—the groups "could not compete with the government's new organizations, they operated so autonomously they did not have a unity of purpose that linked the groups under an umbrella identity, they did not follow a defined set of rules, and they were insular—i.e., primarily for chavistas (Hawkins, 2010, 178-9). This explanation of the Circles makes good sense but it is problematic as a generalization about other mobilized groups.

More importantly, Hawkins's analysis abstracts these insights from their temporal context. As a result, he cannot capture the temporal fluidity that characterized practices I have grouped under popular development and popular voice. The tradeoff here is that Hawkins can generate some comparative theoretical propositions about CBRs as examples of populist organizations but he cannot demonstrate whether the assumptions behind these propositions remained valid as mobilization under chavismo developed different features and varied outlooks. My account of

mapping mobilization was not only about an evolving organizational landscape. It shows how multiple practices of collective action coexisting in the same arena of the polity.

In this respect, Orren and Skowronek's notion of "multiple orders" is useful (Orren and Skowronek, 1994, 1996). They argue that change is both visible and likely when there is intercurrency between multiple orders. Intercurrency, an occurrence where there is a running in between of two entities, refers to the idea that the aligning and realigning of layers, which can alternatively be termed shifting configurations of conditions, gives birth to the switchmen of history that change the tracks as developments move along. Their argument is pitched at the level of relatively stable institutional orders becoming interwoven. What I draw from this is the spirit of the idea that multiple orders may exist in one polity and that their interactions can result in configurations that carry the old and incorporate the new.

Thus, the critical point about this evolutionary approach concerns my claim that state-based mobilization encompassed multiple elements pregnant with different meanings. This may help us understand why Communal Councils or MTAs, groups heavily dependent on the state and on Chávez's personal political support, simultaneously could have genuine value and meaning as barrio organizations for horizontal voice and producing development outcomes. Initial studies of the Councils by polling firms and the Centro Gumilla NGO reach conclusions corroborating these claims. Alfredo Croes, a pollster who coordinated a survey for Datos Polling, concludes that CCs are "basic organizations for community spirit" (Croes, November 2011, p. 22) while Jesus Machado, coordinator of the Gumilla study, wrote that Council participation reveals "a progressive process of popular leadership and responsibility aimed toward constructive solutions for creating a better life" (Machado, Centro Gumilla, 2009). According to government figures, one third of the 35,000 Councils that reportedly existed in 2010 had in the past or were currently managing funds

for community development projects (Interview #42). In short, Councils had multidimensional potential, but they seemed to be evolving into single dimensional organizations for partisan-controlled development.

“It’s very symbolic, you see? The way the *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (MTA) endured from 1999 to 2005 without ‘a cent,’ while always maintaining their principles and showing conviction that this way [voluntary participation] was the path. Other movements demobilized without financial support. With the MTAs, this did not happen, they had evidence of their worth and showed perseverance.”

Alejandro Hitcher, Hidrocapital President, August 13, 2009

“Brother, everything in life is political.”

Roberto Sanchez, Co-Founder, MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz, November 25, 2009

“What is the next form of struggle for the MTAs?”

Giovanni Arrighi, Professor of Sociology, Observation to Author, 2008

## Chapter 5: Popular Development in El Rosario-Santa Cruz: Institutional Mobilization in a Caracas Barrio, 1999-2010

Much thinking about grassroots development used to be guided by a romantic notion: community development requires maximum community participation. Lisa Peattie’s work of political anthropology, The View from the Barrio, captures key elements of that romantic notion (Peattie, 1968). Her ethnography examines Kennedy Administration Alliance for Progress-funded development projects in San Felix, a working class barrio in Ciudad Guayana, the Venezuelan industrial city designed in part by a team of M.I.T. urban planners. Peattie’s research described the Alliance’s development professionals as strongly committed to the idea that ‘the community’ needed to learn to “solve its own problems by its own efforts” (Peattie, 1968, 54). She argued that an ideology of democratic development permeated development professionals’ thinking, and, that this ideological approach distorted their ability to comprehend development’s practical elements.

The whole community did not need to act, Peattie’s research concluded, for community development to effectively take place. For it [San Felix] to “initiate procedures for solving some general problems,” all that was needed was “a sufficiently active and influential working segment” (Peattie, 1968, 67). Moreover, for this working segment to move from proposals for problem

solving to problem solving solutions, they required a sponsor. *Acción Democrática* (Democratic Action, AD), Venezuela's dominant social democratic political party, provided sponsorship.

In the twenty first century, discourse on community development is less about maximizing participation and more about developing flexible approaches to strengthening civil society. For example, World Bank projects on 'participatory development' seek to generate strengthened civil societies through market and community-based strategies (World Bank, 2013). Yet, a Bank published study of participatory development projects concludes that "civil society" failure is in fact very common. The same study argues that "effective collective action is usually conditioned by a 'cooperative infrastructure' that presupposes functional state institutions—and is likely to be far more challenging in its absence" (Mansuri and Rao, 2013, 4).<sup>73</sup>

The Bank-published study deserves praise for its non-ideological account of the state's central role in constituting a cooperative infrastructure. But, the study does not adequately address a major semantic question: what does effective collective action refer to? Is effectiveness measured by community development outcomes that make economic impact and open the door to incorporation—including a squatter town in the planning processes of the formal city? What if community development is successful at project implementation but predominantly technocratic in nature— that is, it does not entail popular actions at the levels of local actors managing development project resources, cultivating forms of popular voice, or generating forms of consciousness? What is the difference between community development and popular development and what role does 'political sponsorship' play in contributing to a cooperative infrastructure that stimulates collective action with a dual technical and social character?

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<sup>73</sup> This is a fairly strong pro-state observation from a publication associated with the Bank. To be sure, the authors mention the need to consider a "market-based strategy" (Mansuri and Rao, 2013, 4).

*Popular Development, Popular Voice: MTA Mobilization in a Caracas Barrio*

This account seeks to contribute to debates about the institutional conditions for and content of effective collective action. It situates an example of community water development in its political and institutional contexts. Context is crucial for making sense of the ways in which *Mesa Técnica de Agua* (Technical Water Committee, MTA) El Rosario-Santa Cruz—the group that oversaw community development through activities undertaken as part of policy programs created by state water utility Hidrocapital—can be understood as a case of effective collective action. Moreover, MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz’s collective action can plausibly be understood as effective in two main respects.

MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz’s most visible achievement was the successful administration of a potable water project. The project, originally imagined in 1999 by the individuals who became the MTA leaders, benefitted approximately 25,000 residents in the urban slums encompassed by the El Rosario-Santa Cruz neighborhood. The project lasted two years, from 2005 to October 2007, with MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz completing the proposed project under budget and, within the envisioned timeframe. Moreover, the MTA installed the new water lines efficiently and this prompted Hidrocapital to approve the project’s expansion. The project included service upgrades on 114 streets instead of the initially proposed 57.

Changes to the water service infrastructure clearly constituted community development. But did MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz also entail popular development—micro-level economic development combining with popular action practices during key aspects of project implementation? Was project implementation subject to neighborhood-level collective decision-making in some meaningful way? Was the work—the project administration and the actual construction—performed by some representative group of ‘the people’ in the neighborhood or did



an external sponsor fulfill project implementation from start to finish? What forms of collective voice were present?

### *Intermediation, Institutional Mobilization, and Facilitative Leadership*

Consistent with Peattie's insight about what is needed to get community development moving, a dedicated cohort of four community leaders served as the “sufficiently active and influential working segment” that made proposals (Peattie, 1971, 67). But unlike in Peattie's San Felix, where state institutions depended on efforts by party *Acción Democrática* (Democratic Action, AD), the arrangement revealed a different sequence and balance of power, state presence before party presence, and a more equal balance between state and party influence, respectively.

Beginning in roughly mid-2000, community leaders in El Rosario-Santa Cruz established a productive working relationship with a state frontline worker. That official, Dircia García, made a crucial difference. She knit two elements together—the interpersonal leaders who had convening power and the institutional principles that gave collective action broader meaning as an engagement in planning for community development. To grasp the significance of these interactions it is useful to situate them in the context of an institutional-level pattern of intermediation. As described in Chapter 3, intermediation refers to the interactive properties of spaces and groups situated at the interstices of state and society. Program-created spaces and groups are the building blocks of a larger relational process understood as intermediation—the linking and locking into place of state-society relationships that open channels for groups to express preferences by transmitting demands up the chain and for institutions to shape preference formation through proposing problem-solving solutions down the chain (Schmitter, 1994, 20).

Grasping what is distinctive about intermediation on a case-by-case basis requires examining the actor-associated practices that give spaces and groups distinctive meanings. In this case, institutional mobilization captures intermediation's specific pattern. Mobilization was institutionally mediated by frontline workers of the state water company Hidrocapital.

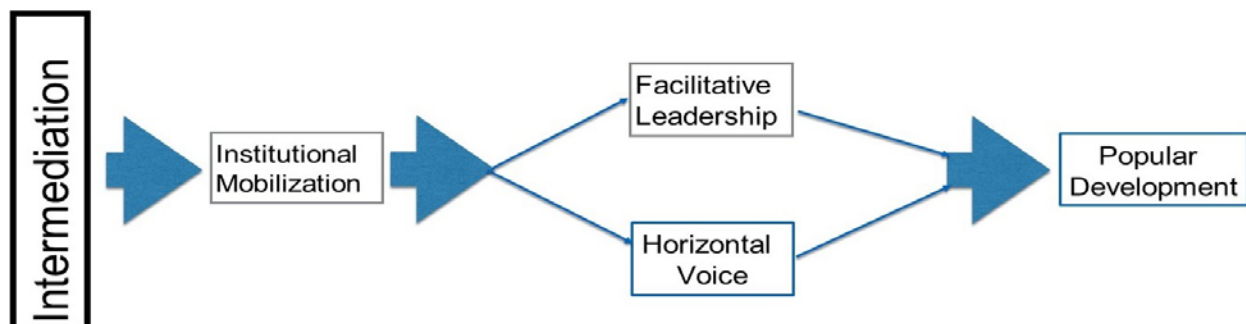
To gain theoretical purchase on the practices that made up institutional mobilization in El Rosario-Santa Cruz, I turn to the notion of facilitative leadership. The term facilitative leadership is drawn from work by Chris Ansell and Alison Gash (2012). Their research on collaborative governance settings attempts to unpack what practices of leadership look like when coordination and service delivery is shared across state-society or market-state divides in contexts involving multiple—more than two—stakeholders. Hidrocapital had a bilateral relationship with El Rosario-Santa Cruz, and, therefore, strictly speaking, policy implementation did not constitute collaborative governance. However, the framework of collaborative governance still applies. It provides crucial insights into the nature of agency in the context of direct state-society interactions and situates these in the context of facilitation across the state-society divide. For example, in examining how individuals make crucial contributions to successful collaborative governance, Ansell and Gash highlight catalyzing and “stewardship”—identifying and creating opportunities and establishing the principles of a process and protecting its integrity, respectively (Ansell and Gash, 2012, 6). It is crucial to emphasize catalyzing and stewardship are practices, which means they are not role specific—e.g., actors in state and society may effectuate stewardship.

Furthermore, the collective action of forming MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz stemmed from a foundation of horizontal voice. Individual societal leaders and state officials helped build this foundation during roughly four years of interactions in which they did not have direct access to outside resources. According to O'Donnell, “horizontal voice” needs to be distinguished from

vertical voice, the addressing of power holders in some effort to hold them accountable, so that we clearly understand the term refers to the perceptions of collective identity and civic efficacy that undergird attempted collective action (O'Donnell, 1999, 65). Horizontal voice entails the mutual addressing of one another as a “we” that can be constitutive of a “collective identity” around ideals and material interests (Ibid). It helps constitute an opportunity for collective action.

In isolation from the pre-project context (2000-2004), there are good reasons to argue MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz qualifies as an example popular development. For example, the leadership of the MTA earned a degree of popular legitimacy in their neighborhood by participating in elections and undertaking outreach efforts to involve residents. In addition, they held direct responsibility for project management and hired community-sourced laborers to the construction crew. These steps were not only indicative of self-management they also helped infuse project implementation with a sense of civic pride. Thus, by also demonstrating how state officials' interactions with community leaders helped cultivate horizontal voice in the course of establishing an basis for the MTA to emerge, this account paints a clear picture of why this case is an example of strong popular development and why institutional mobilization was integral to this outcome.

**Figure 18: Institutional Mobilization and Popular Development in El Rosario-Santa Cruz**



### *Limitations: Particularistic Incorporation and the Leadership Quandary*

Of course, no success story is without flaws. In fact, a perfect case is arguably of less value since its anomalous nature reduces the example's significance for drawing comparative implications. In this vein, the account addresses three limitations associated with MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz.

One, for three key societal participants in the MTA, the conclusion of the development project positioned them on political incorporation pathways marked by non-universalistic forms of inclusion. Particularistic political incorporation entailed subjective relationships based on patronage, surrogacy and brokerage. These outcomes indicate political incorporation became a convenient strategy for government officials to take advantage of mobilized populations for partisan political ends. Second, Hidrocapital declined to take advantage of the opportunity of improved relations with the neighborhood to establish an agreement for neighborhood residents to pay tariffs for their new water infrastructure. Regardless of the tariff level, the main missing link was the unfulfilled opportunity to strengthen stateness. The lack of a new relationship between the neighborhood and city planning institutions suggest territorial incorporation was partial.

Third, MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz depended on a handful of dedicated individuals. This may be true of most community programs, and not just in poor developing contexts. In this vein, the broader implications concern the quandary of leadership as a path dependent phenomenon (Mahoney, 2000; 2001). After frontline workers for the state established solid working relationships with the most active leaders in the community, the increasing returns of relationships with these same individuals outweighed any principle-based interest in mobilizing the excluded or unorganized (Pierson, 2000). This was a highly pragmatic matter. Frontline workers faced pressures to demonstrate they were performing their jobs as MTA mobilizers. Mobilization's path

of least resistance entailed working with the best organized--that is, recruiting visible leaders or those identified as potential leaders.

## Figure 19: Facilitative Leadership and Sponsorship

<u>Community Catalysts</u>	<u>Facilitating Stewards</u>	<u>Political Sponsors</u>
El Rosario-Santa Cruz MTA Communal Core	Hidrocapital	Chavismo
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Juan Martinez— (Veteran Leader)</li> <li>• Roberto Sanchez— (Veteran Leader)</li> <li>• Susana Echaveria— (New Leader)</li> <li>• Franklin Delgado— (Bookkeeper)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dircía Garcia— Frontline Worker, Santa Cruz</li> <li>• Victor Díaz—Head Frontline Worker, Caracas</li> <li>• Alejandro Hitcher— President, Hidrocapital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hugo Chávez— President of Venezuela</li> <li>• Diosdado Cabello, Gubernatorial Candidate, Miranda</li> <li>• Jose Vicente Rangel, Vice-President/Foreign Minister, Defense Minister</li> </ul>

### *Roadmap*

The first section describes the facilitative leadership framework. The second section provides the background to the emergence of a constructive working relationship between community leaders in El Rosario-Santa Cruz and Hidrocapital. The third section examines societal perceptions of state decision-making by considering how different community leaders interpreted the influence of state and political actors in rewarding MTA Santa Cruz-El Rosario with funds for water community development. The fourth section tells the story of project implementation, mostly from the perspective of the community bookkeeper hired to help make the MTA's work

progress efficiently. The fifth section addresses the political incorporation pathways of the three main leaders, and the conclusion establishes this example's significance in the context of chavismo's development from a populist political movement to an incipient party-state structure.

## I. Facilitative Leadership and Hidrocapital's Community Water Management

What is facilitative leadership? What kind of leadership phenomenon does it refer to? The term is at least somewhat counterintuitive. It cuts against the assumption that individuals singlehandedly solve problems. The term is not an attempt to subvert standard understandings of leadership, however. Essentially, facilitative leadership suggests that, besides the examples of individuals accomplishing goals without help, we also need to consider the ways in which leaders provide the crucial assistance for change to come to fruition.

Ansell and Gash introduce facilitative leadership to advance understanding of collaborative governance. Coordination among disparate stakeholders and the co-location of these actors at the service-delivery level, Ansell and Gash argue, are the key characteristics of a collaborative governance process (Ansell and Gash, 2012, 2-3). Moreover, they suggest that collaborative governance processes may be generative of shared-power situations. A 'shared power' context entails different stakeholders controlling "distinct resources" and possessing "their own distinct bases of power and authority" (Ansell and Gash, 2012, 5). As such, a discussion of leadership needs to move beyond 'great man theory' and be framed in terms of a "model of collaborative leadership" (Ansell and Gash, 2012). In this sense, we are examining leadership in contexts marked by the need to coordinate effectively, not simply command down. "Leaders may bear responsibility for steering collaboration toward efficient service delivery, consensus, or creative problem-

solving,” but, as Ansell and Gash note, “they must work within the constraints imposed by voluntary action and shared power” (Ibid, 4).

Consider, for example, the challenges of venue setting and stimulating participation. The initial challenges of collaborative governance are considerable. They entail more than identifying the active groups, either by working with the most organized or expending resources on generating organizational capacity from those that show signs of potential or interest, but do not have the means to fulfill ambitious objectives right away. They also entail convening. For participation to be stimulated there must also exist a steering institution with an interest in cultivating stakeholders’ participation, an interest that helps bring a process together, or an actor with status legitimacy that, on the basis of reputation, attracts participants (Ansell and Gash, 2008). In other words, before thinking about whether rules enhance the stability or efficacy of a collaborative process, the factors shaping the formation of a process need to be understood. Facilitative leadership, which Ansell and Gash define as “helping others to make things happen” (Ansell and Gash, 2012, 6), becomes critical for getting something moving.<sup>74</sup>

The genuinely innovative aspect of the facilitative leadership concept concerns its place in a broader framework for rethinking the nature of state-society or multi-stakeholder interactions. The critical point of facilitative leadership is that leadership is a practice. This implies it is not role specific. Actors in different positions can play similar roles, with, of course, some expected variations. We can highlight two styles of leadership—the “trained” professionals and the “organic” advocates (Ansell and Gash, 2012, 6). Moreover, these two leadership styles possess “different strengths”: “professional training, no vested interest, skills for mediation and a

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<sup>74</sup> One potential limitation of this definition is that ‘helping’ encompasses a very general term (Ansell and Gash, 2012, 6). For example, a hired technician—a lawyer or architect—can provide critical assistance to help others make things happen. But, their services are replaceable. Thus, subject to the context, it may ultimately be useful to redefine facilitative leadership as lending invaluable skills, strategy and vision to help people make things happen.

legitimacy that arises from their neutrality and independence” and “local knowledge or subject expertise, social capital for convening people,” respectively (Ibid, 6). The different positions from which these leadership styles operate simply refers to their specific context of knowledge and concerns. In other words, trained and organic participants can both make invaluable contributions to “helping others to make things happen” (Ibid). They are likely, however, to assist in different manners. Varying strengths dispose them to align their proposals and efforts with their areas of expertise—e.g., the outside trainer may be better suited to establishing the official ground rules while the organic leader may be critical in convening parties to partake in the process (Ibid, 8).<sup>75</sup>

To link these two leadership styles with practices, Ansell and Gash identify three typical ways in which facilitative leadership is exercised. These are “broadly captured by the terms steward, mediator, and catalyst” (Ansell and Gash, 2012, 6). However, it may be helpful to conceive of them as categories of practices and so I use the gerund—that is, stewarding, mediating, and catalyzing. This small but important change draws attention to the fact that more than one individual may contribute toward stewardship or mediation.

### *From Theory to Case: Hydrocapital’s Community Water Management*

A facilitative leadership framework helps illuminate key aspects of Hydrocapital’s efforts to implement Community Water Management (GCA) and the outcomes of participation in this policy context. First, GCA implementation in El Rosario-Santa Cruz provides an example of the challenges policy implementers faced to installing programs dependent on voluntary collective

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<sup>75</sup> Disaggregating leadership’s facilitative forms is consistent with what they term a “contingency approach” to collaborative governance (Ibid, 3). Their contingency approach suggests that chronicling a history of policy implementation strictly from the perspective of structural incentives will prove inadequate. Examination of the behavioral incentive context, defined strictly based on the official rules for collaboration, is likely to be unsatisfying, they argue, as “there is no single ‘best way’ to exercise collective leadership” and “different tasks, goals, and contexts will place distinctive demands on leaders” (Ibid, 3).



action. Hydrocapital leaders had the responsibility to steer policy implementation but they faced constraints to achieving their objectives. Histories of societal distrust of the state and limited community interest in voluntary participation constituted obstacles for Hydrocapital's outreach efforts. Moreover, since Hydrocapital's initial objectives entailed mobilizing MTAs as voluntary groups for the purposes of generating awareness about water service issues, and the utility's plans for addressing them, to participate or not became a choice and attempts to influence decision-makers made the choice a matter of power relations.

Faced with the reality that they could not implement effectively policy programs without first acquiring compliance through community members' participation, the operational behavior of successful frontline workers concerned facilitation. Opting for a facilitative mode over a command mode itself served as recognition that residents controlled "distinct resources" and possessed "their own distinct bases of power and authority" (Ansell and Gash, 2012, 5). In this respect, the method Hydrocapital used to implement policy generated a context of shared power.<sup>76</sup> Thus, second, we can better distinguish the practical roles of trained outside leaders and organic participants. Even though state and societal actors shared responsibilities while providing stewardship, mediation, and catalyzing collective action, they made different contributions to these outcomes. Third, facilitative leadership helps to capture the nature of collective action's impacts in this context. From above they helped generate a sense of symbolic recognition and from below they helped cultivate horizontal voice in the neighborhood context. This was possible amid institutional mobilization occasioning opportunities for development to unfold in a popular fashion.

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<sup>76</sup> This was not universally true. In other examples of popular development, the availability of funding seemed to singlehandedly produce the mobilization of community organizations. In these instances, it is debatable whether the notion of "shared power" captures the context of interactions compellingly.

## II. Institutionalized Mobilization and a Foundation for State-Society Relations

During Venezuela's tripartite crisis in the 1990s—political turbulence, economic malaise, and social unrest—the Caracas metropolitan area experienced a severe drought. The drought, which lasted three years (1992-1995), made water policy officials' jobs exceedingly difficult. It resulted in water shortages throughout the city and surrounding suburban areas. According to then-President of Hidrocapital Jose Maria De Vianni (2013) water shortages affected all barrios in Caracas, though the effects varied from barrio to barrio. An established barrio with better connections to the city's formal service networks suffered from inefficient but consistent distribution of water service, while newer barrios on the peripheral rings of the city suffered from lengthier gaps between service delivery—e.g., water service being delivered every fifteen days for a four to six hour window during which household heads fill plastic water tubs to ration from.

*Figure 10—Outlooks from a Barrio*





*Figure 11—Outlooks from the Formal City*



During the drought, the crisis in potable water service provision changed the character of state-society relations in the sector. The relative social peace that previously characterized relations came to an end. José Maria de Viana noted that during his tenure as Hidrocapital President, 1992-1998, the utility confronted a “citizen’s insurgency motored by water shortages” (de Viana, May 10, 2014). Furthermore, he noted the utility’s reputation problem by referring to the popular

nickname for the company—“*Hidro-criminal*,” a term that captured the public’s perception of its inaction as criminally neglect (DeViana, 1999, accessed September 30, 2015).<sup>77</sup>

*Demanding “una respuesta” (an answer)*

In the neighborhood of El Rosario-Santa Cruz relations with Hidrocapital worsened during this period as a generalized sense of discontent boiled over into disruptive protest. During the drought, the already sub-optimal quality of water service deteriorated considerably. The time between deliveries in the ‘water cycle’ increased from approximately fifteen days to thirty days, and pressure in the pipes was reduced. Second, Hidrocapital did not develop policy mechanisms to channel discontent about the declining quality of water service. Although it undertook ameliorative service measures, such as contracting privately operated water trucks to deliver free potable water in barrio neighborhoods, the utility did not launch community outreach programs or initiate communications about addressing the fundamental problems underlying service issues.

In Baruta, the municipality surrounding El Rosario-Santa Cruz, Hidrocapital had few incentives to develop pro-active strategies. In Baruta, the Mayor’s office did not make deliberate overtures to build bridges with barrio populations. On the other hand, in Libertador municipality, Mayor Aristubulo Isturiz (1992-1995) took explicit steps toward de-centering municipal government down to the barrio level by calling for groups to collaborate in the Governing from the Parish initiative. In Libertador Hidrocapital responded to Mayor Isturiz’s proposal, acting in a pro-active manner to channel barrio-based discontent about water service. In short, Hidrocapital

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<sup>77</sup> Pro-and anti-Chávez water policy makers offered divergent diagnoses about the water sector except on the issue of social protests during the drought. De Viana was a harsh critic of chavismo while Cristobal Francisco Ortiz, who Chávez appointed to the Presidency of Hidroven in 2004, claimed in a 2007 speech that the metropolitan area experienced approximately 500 water protests a year during the peak of the water crisis in between 1992-1995 (Ortiz, 2007, “*El Sector APS como actor protagónico en la construcción de la nueva cultura hídrica*,” p. 3).

did not reject opportunities to de-center its operations. But if no third party institution compelled Hidrocapital to offer an ‘answer,’ then a response of this kind was unlikely.

For Juan Martínez, a longtime community leader in El Rosario-Santa Cruz, the utility’s lack of communication was just as frustrating as the change in service quality. What frustrated him most was that “*no habia respuesta*” (there was no answer) to citizen protests about bad quality service (Interview #2). By “answer” Martínez referred to manifest signs of urgency and strategic planning for the future (Ibid). Put another way, Martínez felt that stepped up engagement by Hidrocapital might have suggested a deepened commitment to mitigate the effects in the near term and it might have raised the possibility of establishing a routine of interactions—a first step to establishing an institutionalized process.

Frustrated by the lack of an “answer,” Martínez, along with other residents from Santa Cruz-El Rosario, turned to disruptive collective action. Martínez described undertaking these protests on an intermittent basis throughout the drought period and through 1998. First, Martínez and Roberto Sanchez pooled funds to hire a taxi service that could transport them to Hidrocapital offices. Second, they had to round up enough people to ensure that the protest would have a critical mass. The residents Martínez approached for the role of participant had to be sold on a risky proposition. They were asked to participate in a demonstration that entailed physically occupying the utility’s entrance to block the flow of persons in and out of the building, thus causing commotion in and outside the office building (Interview #2). Third, protest leaders to prepare a communication strategy for their constituents; they had the task of setting a tone of fearlessness to help strengthen the resolve of the token participants in the protest.

Martínez used disruptive mobilizations a handful of times to gain access to senior level authorities (Interview #2). Roughly, the routine unfolded as follows. After occupying the

building's entryway, the protestors would demand to meet with a management-level official. According to Martinez, they would demand a meeting with the Hidrocapital President but agreed to meet with other officials so long as they were senior enough to make a binding decision of some nature. To prove he wanted a real 'answer' Martinez submitted a letter that roughly outlined a proposed new water network (Ibid).

Martinez described these efforts as fruitless. Hidrocapital provided some relief through privately contracted water trucks. But, this amounted to patchwork. It did not provide a "*respuesta*" in the form of a proposal for a water development project (Interview #2).<sup>78</sup> No sustainable progress was being made, argued Martinez, even though it was obvious Hidrocapital needed to repair the outdated and chaotically-organized distribution network pipelines.

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<sup>78</sup> The neighborhood's densely populated inner sectors consist of narrow, labyrinthine alley streets. As a result, water tankers did not have good access points for delivering water on a house-to-house basis.

*Figure 12—Dilapidated Water Distribution Tubs—‘Spaghetti Network’*





### *Frontline Workers and Community Leaders*

In late 1999, García began her employment as a Hidrocapital frontline worker. The bulk of her work entailed promotion of Hidrocapital's *Gestión Comunitario del Agua* policy programs—installing *Consejos Comunitarios de Agua* and promoting *Mesas Técnicas de Agua*. Because policy makers targeted barrios to stimulate popular sector actors' participation in these policy programs, it made sense for policy promotion to mostly take place at the street level. For example, out of García's 40 hours on the job, she spent approximately 25 of those hours on the street promoting these policy programs. García primarily worked the barrios of Baruta, the municipal seat of power for Martínez's El Rosario-Santa Cruz neighborhood.<sup>79</sup>

García recalled prioritizing El Rosario-Santa Cruz because colleagues told her it was an 'historic barrio.' She explained this meant the utility's Hidrocapital's institutional memory included some documentation of the neighborhood's protests and problems. In Santa Cruz, the path García followed to promoting GCA policy programs fit within the general scheme of frontline workers' professional routine—a pattern discussed earlier in Chapter 3. That routine had two main parts—a) community outreach, which included state officials undertaking listening tours, offering narratives of past injustices to show a deferential posture, and attempting to establish lines of communication, and b) street-level policy dissemination, which included: firsthand engagements with residents, learning about local water problems to understand community-specific dynamics regarding service, and recruiting potential leaders who might be willing to using their convening power to aid Hidrocapital's goal of holding CCA forums or like assemblies. Frontline workers took all of these steps, but not in a set order. García started with leader recruitment.

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<sup>79</sup> Hidrocapital's Metropolitan Community Affairs Office divided the labors of its six officers by water zones. Hidrocapital drew the borders for these zones based on its water distribution system, not based on the political division of the city by municipality.

García met Martinez and Sanchez in October 1999, the same month she initiated efforts to promote GCA policy programs (Hidrocapital, October 18, 2005). Usually, the meeting place was either an alley corner on Sanchez's block or at the only public meeting place available in the *La Union* sector—an open air community space located at the entrance to the barrio. García attempted to publicize the meetings, posting leaflets that listed their date and time and going door to door to inform residents and merchants. But, ultimately, generating interest in a meeting depended on Martinez and Sanchez passing the information around via word of mouth. Thus, the two of them were the linchpins of the operation (Interview #31).

*The Blessing and Curse of 'Los Vitalicios' (The Lifelong Participants')*

The centrality of Martinez and Sanchez's leadership to the success of neighborhood-based initiatives had long constituted a blessing and a curse. Their continuous involvement kept things going. But, dependence on these figures also posed a challenge in terms of attracting new participants. These issues had historical roots. Martinez and Sanchez were longtime community leaders who had significant name recognition in the neighborhood. In fact, neighbors and friends occasionally ridiculed them, calling them *los líderes vitalicos* (veterans, the leaders for life). This nickname carried negative connotations. It implied their self-appointment to these leadership posts. Nevertheless, their leadership experience helped give them some stature. Before leading water protests and organizing meetings about water problems in the neighborhood, they were leaders of the *Asociaciones de Vecinos* (Neighborhood Associations, NA)—the prevailing neighborhood self-help groups that had a brief moment of success before fading in the 1990s (Ellner 1999).

Franklin Delgado, a resident of El Rosario and a close associate of Sanchez who was hired as a bookkeeper to smooth project administration, provided a critical, but dispassionate view of

Martinez's tenure as an NA leader. According to Delgado, when Martinez was President of the Santa Cruz NA, he gained a reputation for being willing to work with any external group interested in providing assistance. Delgado illustrated this point by suggesting Martinez worked with the then-NGO *Primero Justicia* (First Justice) and received visits from U.S. Embassy officials (Interview #46). In Delgado's eyes, Martinez was hard working but also "opportunistic" (González, Ibid).<sup>80</sup>

Gonzalez used "opportunism" in its pejorative sense—that is, as the tendency to “seize opportunities without any regard for principles” (Nettl, 1969, 130). The implication was that while Martinez deserved credit for either creating an opportunity or realizing one existed, he lacked judiciousness when it came to forming relationships with outside groups. Sanchez also first won recognition as a community leader by serving as the head of the El Rosario Neighborhood Association (Interview #61). Sanchez described his experience at the helm as positive, but noted the experience had limited impact. For example, he underscored the positive effects of a socio-economic census of the community, sponsored by the Municipality of Baruta and carried out in 1998 by a Jesuit-affiliated NGO, *El Centro del Servicio de la Acción Popular* (CESAP). CESAP contracted community members to administer the survey in the field. As NA President, Sanchez partially oversaw the census process, which, he felt, helped residents visualize the challenges facing barrio households on an individual and collective level (Interview #61). The census was only possible, Sanchez pointed out, because of the existence of the NA (Ibid). Nonetheless, he warned against inferring too much. After the census, he noted, “No one paid attention to our needs” (Ibid).

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<sup>80</sup> *Primero Justicia* (Justice First), the political party of 2012 and 2013 Presidential Candidate Henrique Capriles, began as a civil society association of young lawyers that established a presence in barrios throughout Miranda state.

### *Interpersonal Leadership: A Kernel of Mobilization*

It is important to explore the positive and negative connotation of the nickname “*vitalicio*.” Although residents had some suspicions about the roles played by Martinez and Sanchez, they also acknowledged their manifest influence and admitted that their leadership kept discussions of neighborhood politics going. When I raised the issue of ‘*vitalicio*’ leaders to Hidrocapital’s Community Affairs Planning Department Director Asyadith Pérez, I had expected a blank stare or unreceptive response. Instead, she grinned and admitted *vitalicios* constituted ‘facts of life’—that is, inconvenient truths for the government’s policy ideals (Interview #43). They challenged simplistic narratives of organic participation. She also suggested the problem was natural and could be managed. Pérez expressed a twofold position—participation without leadership results in disorder, but while leaders constitute a kind of *sine qua none* for effective participation they also have different characteristics.

Describing the differences between individuals who wield personalistic control over an MTA and those who are leaders and representatives, Pérez observed: “Now, let’s see, ‘I am the president, and I make the decisions.’ No, that is not the idea of the process. ‘My job is to represent, to conciliate, to develop consensus,’ which is a very different thing” (Interview #43). She admitted that this implied centralization. “Of course, part of the idea is to avoid having to communicate with 200 to 500 persons. But to abandon the core significance of the meetings as ‘assemblies of citizens,’ where participants identify service problems and shape agreements, would be fatal for the success of the process” (Interview #43). In other words, Pérez’s ‘real world’ argument was that to get something approximating a self-governing process moving, there had to be officers of some form and these needed to exercise representation of some kind. She also underscored another

aspect of these leaders' skill set. *Vitalicio* leaders were valuable because they could move people into some loosely organized associational form. If they lost this ability, they would have lost their status as *vitalicios*, she argued.

To make better sense of the *vitalicios* phenomenon Martinez and Sanchez can be described as exhibiting what Selznick termed "interpersonal leadership" (Selznick, 1957, 28). Selznick distinguishes interpersonal leadership from large-scale "*institutional* leadership," a phenomenon defined by expertise in the "promotion and protection of values" in an organization (Ibid). The task of the interpersonal leader, argued Selznick, is to "smooth the path of human interaction, ease communication, evoke personal devotion, and allay anxiety" (Ibid, 27). In this sense, interpersonal and institutional leadership are salient characteristics of two types of collective action—setting a body of people into motion and rationalizing a multidimensional process into a coherent whole, respectively. Thus, interpersonal leaders may be community catalysts that are skilled at spotting and seizing opportunities. They may also be crucial to establishing a collective process because they can use their status to attract other participants.

### *Costs of Leadership Mobilization*

Frontline workers understood that interpersonal leadership skills were crucial to setting a public process of collective action in motion. In other words, they effectively solicited interpersonal leadership's convening power to catalyze the process by "which a group goes from being a passive collection of individuals to an active participant in public life" (Tilly, 1978, 69). They also recognized this dependence on a few dedicated individuals had costs. Not only did it raise the 'free rider' problem (Olson, 1965). It also risked the possibility of leaders adopting a cynical attitude about the rank-and file—the idea succinctly summed up by Oliver's observation

that if ‘I don’t do it,’ then “nobody else will” (Oliver, 1984, 601). More broadly, reliance on interpersonal leadership posed three interrelated challenges: potential for institutional bias—favoritism toward these individual leaders; obstacles to broadening participation beyond the networks of persons affiliated with these leaders; and the possibility that the core leadership group would face questions about their legitimacy at a future point.

### III. Political Sponsorship and State Stewardship: Contexts for Collective Action

In early 2001, Foreign Minister Jose Vicente Rangel and then-Chávez Chief of Staff Diosdado Cabello visited El Rosario-Santa Cruz. Martinez hosted them, accompanying these two senior officials on their visit. Thanks to his experience as a NA president welcoming outsider groups visiting as part of community outreach efforts, Martinez quickly identified the situation’s stakes. Essentially, Martinez chaperoned these outsiders. He looked after their visit to ensure they gained a positive impression of the neighborhood and departed with some sense of optimism about residents’ organizational capacities.

While playing host and chaperone, Martinez also tried to take advantage of the opportunity of firsthand contact with high-level officials. He handed each government official a letter describing a project to upgrade the water service network. With the letter, he enclosed a roughly sketched map of the water infrastructure. Additionally, Martinez’s letter expressed interest in carrying out such a project with state funding and through a community organization, though he did not specifically mention the MTA vehicle.

The visit by Cabello and Rangel figured prominently in El-Rosario Santa Cruz residents’ accounts of Hidrocapital-neighborhood relations. Four important members of the Santa Cruz MTA—the *vitalicios* Martinez and Sanchez and the new leaders Susana Echeveria and

Francisco Delgado—spoke at length about these officials’ visit in piecing together loose narrative chains of events leading up to Hidroven’s funding of the project. This is not surprising, as visits from high-level officials tend to be memorable.<sup>81</sup> What is significant is that community leaders interpreted this event’s impact differently.

For example, Martinez and Sanchez’s narratives express their appreciation for the intermediation provided by Hidrocapital frontline workers and policy programs more broadly. Their accounts pay tribute to Hidrocapital’s stewardship of GCA policy programs. They recognize that the utility not only fulfilled its responsibilities of establishing and protecting venues for regularized state-society interaction, but, also, that its steward, García, furnished these spaces with meanings that helped protect the integrity of the process. In their views, she took measures that effectively kept the opportunity window open. In Echeveria’s contrasting narrative the importance of intermediation paled in comparison to the direct support from the Chávez administration. Her account suggests it was chavista politics all the way down. As such, Echeveria’s account pays tribute to chavismo’s background role in sponsoring GCA policy programs and converting discrete relationships into more complex situations of coproduction.

### *State Stewardship: Establishing and Protecting the Integrity of the Grounds*

Hidrocapital documents that provide an official history of the utility’s policy efforts in Santa Cruz-El Rosario do not report the community visit by Cabello and Rangel. Instead, the utility’s official history of the project begins with García transmitting the demands from the community to her superiors (Hidrocapital, October 18, 2007). The document reports that

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<sup>81</sup> Cabello, who held a range of government posts as senior as Vice-President, became the second most powerful man in the government power structure. Rangel became less powerful as he grew older and distanced himself, intellectually, from the Chávez government.

Hidrocapital expressed interest in a project of this scale, promised to search for the funds in 2004, and then, in 2005, reported back to the community the news of the Hidroven Community Project Financing Fund (Hidrocapital, October 18, 2005, *Memoria y Cuenta*, pp. 2-3). While it was an exaggeration for Hidrocapital to suggest it produced these outcomes alone, there is truth in the claim the utility supported the process and generated a funding opportunity.

After the emotional high of chaperoning senior level officials, and personally submitting a project packet to Diosdado Cabello and Jose Vicente Rangel, Martinez and Sanchez reported experiencing an anxious uncertainty of waiting. Sanchez noted that he had not let his emotions get the best of him. “I am from Maturín (an oil town in the country’s eastern region), and I have 38 years [living] in the community and no one helped us”— until this experience (Interview #61). Exaggerated or not, Sanchez’s broader point was clear: he was not optimistic about the possibility of receiving a favorable response from the government.

During the uncertain waiting period, frontline worker García García’s daily operational role was to serve as Hidrocapital’s messenger. This made her vulnerable to the typical risk any messenger faces—being made the scapegoat. She tried to avoid this problem by staying focused on next steps, such as proposing ways for Martinez and Sanchez to stay active and gain experience. For example, García called meetings and attempted to make them valuable sessions by inviting utility engineers, and, occasionally, a management level official, to attend. Similarly, she proposed holding an *ad-hoc* ‘community water council’ meetings in the community, with the goal of creating a CCA forum (Interview #31).

According to Martinez and Sanchez, García’s persistent policy promotion helped to create a rhythm to Hidrocapital’s interactions with the neighborhood. But, neither regular contact between García and Santa Cruz nor the initiation of meetings that served as proto-forms of a Water



Community Council (CCA) gave Martinez and Sanchez confidence their project would be approved or funded. Over the four-year interim there were extended moments when prospects seemed bleak, and doubts grew about a successful answer to their “prayers” for the project (Interview #49). With few signs of progress, the cohort scaled back its expectations. For example, Echeveria noted that “one day we talked about the project and the next we forgot about it” (Interview #49).

With the leadership core unsure whether they would in fact receive project approval, they could not make credible promises to the broader public in the neighborhood, and it grew more difficult to attract attendees to meetings. Low attendance intensified the doubts, as change did not seem to be afoot (Interview #43; Interview #31).<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, García's contribution was to help the group maintain morale. Her relationships with Martinez and Sanchez remained strong and her personal dedication helped foster their self-confidence. Moreover, over time, something important happened regarding García's role. As her involvement with Santa Cruz deepened, the boundaries around her role as a state official became harder to draw. She remained the state's messenger but she also seemed to become personally committed to the neighborhood's welfare, not only for professional reasons, but because of developing personal ties. Gradually, García became distinguishable from the state power structure in the sense that she advocated for El Rosario-Santa Cruz from the perspective of the neighborhood.

This strengthened her standing in the community. Moreover, her pro-community stance made it difficult to scapegoat her if the project never received approval. With her role as a frontline

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<sup>82</sup> Perhaps residents perceived the community meetings convened by Hidrocapital to be a token gesture. This perception was partially true. As Chapter 3 underscored, GCA policy commenced as community outreach to improve the utility's standing in neighborhoods that suffered from bad water service.

worker transitioning to that of steward of a process she protected by promoting its principles, she held down an interstitial space between state and society.

### *Leadership Representativity: Gendering Participation*

Fernando Delgado, the bookkeeper, regarded García's stewardship efforts as encapsulating the vocation of service that represented the spirit of Chávez government-sponsored policies toward popular sector populations. About the context of state-society relations before the water project began, Delgado said: "The President [Chávez] was just beginning," and while "I saw he was beginning to make changes by 2002," our efforts to summon people to meetings faced "difficulties" (Interview #46). The residents of El Rosario-Santa Cruz, he said, "had seen so many liar governments they figured this was another example of an empty promise and that behind it lay the goal of getting votes" (Interview #46). This widespread skepticism made Martinez and Sanchez's jobs harder, and it complicated García's ability to implement the policy program. They had to work extra hard to generate enthusiasm and interest. "We were going street by street, knocking on doors, putting up flyers, making announcements with bullhorns, bringing candies with us to get people to talk with us, all of this stuff" (Interview #46). In the meantime, García, on behalf of Hidrocapital, continued to believe in "our" ability to stimulate community interest in the water project and to create a MTA for Santa Cruz (Interview #46).

García situated her personal messages of encouragement in the policy promotion efforts undertaken by Hidrocapital's utility's Community Affairs Office. In this respect, she felt it her professional duty to remind Martinez he was a building block for collective action through the MTAs and CCA forums. In other words, she underscored the principles underlying Martinez's

involvement. This had practical effects. It helped spur Martinez to initiate a new round of mobilization (Interview #31).

Throughout 2002 Martinez and Sanchez executed a plan to broaden participation (Interview #49). Martinez recruited women to participate in the then-ad hoc community meetings with García. Martinez's idea of gendering community organization responded to both the encouragement provided by García and to the threat that, unless participation increased, the idea of community organization would fade away. Recruiting women, according to García, showed that Martinez understood the importance of including new participants. It also indicated Martinez's awareness of concern about his leadership's representativeness. Martinez may have realized that he needed to expand his network to maintain his convening power.

Echeveria's participation in the unstructured process of Santa Cruz-Hidrocapital meetings resulted from Martinez's self-legitimizing effort to promote female participation. One day when Martinez was making the rounds with a bullhorn to recruit women, it happened that Echeveria's mother did not have water service. "Before, to me, it made no difference if other people protested about their water problems. I have always had water [adequate service in comparison to others]. As a result, I was very apathetic" (Interview #49). But, then after hearing her mother press her to take an interest in the community, and with the water service problems at her mother's home bringing home the impact of the bad distribution network, Echeveria began to rethink her complacency. Could she honestly tell herself, she asked in third person, that "my two infant children counted as a legitimate excuse to not express public care for other people's water problems?" (Interview #49). Subsequently, Echeveria reconsidered her apathy. "Go on, my daughter, go to the meetings," Echeveria recounted, was the badgering line stuck in her head. "Then, I began to attend, but I was always more interested in the *political* parts," by which she

meant an interest in establishing personal connections with pro-Chávez politicians and state power holders (Interview #49, my emphasis).

With Echeveria and handful of female residents joining, the effort to recruit women made enough difference to recover the momentum Martinez and Sanchez had worried they might lose.<sup>83</sup> Credit for this accomplishment belongs to García as well as Martinez. Her commitment to the meetings helped the leadership cohort keep the flame burning. It helped them feel satisfied about their work and it indicated that someone with power had made it their mission to listen to their demands and respond as effectively as possible. Though Hidrocapital did not offer financial sponsorship of activities in Santa Cruz-El Rosario, it did pay García while she dedicated her undivided attention to the community. Her personal re-presentation of the state as policy's steward protected the integrity of the institutional ground for state-society interactions.

### *Political Sponsorship: Chavismo All the Way Down?*

In a manner of speaking, Susana Echeveria believed in the power of political sponsorship. Her interpretation of the senior official's visit suggests chavismo's political interests directly shaped Hidrocapital's decision-making, from assigning García to El Rosario-Santa Cruz through the approval and financing of the project. For example, not only did she emphasize the Chávez government's legitimate interests in establishing a state presence in Santa Cruz-El Rosario, she also viewed this development as purposively orchestrated from above. Thus, she believed there was a more or less linear progression of developments. A clear straight line connected the 2001

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<sup>83</sup> It can likely be ruled out that this more diverse supply of participation triggered the Chávez government's selection of the Santa *Crucenos* for receiving resources from the Community Financing Project Fund. García's positive reviews of Santa Cruz's social fabric incorporated mention of the diverse pool of participants. But, as an institutional matter, the 'comunitarios' do not have a formal role in selecting projects to be approved. In this respect, it is not clear how much weight her word, about this fact or others, carried within Hidrocapital.

event, Martinez hosting the visit of senior officials Cabello and Rangel, and the 2005 outcome of Hidrocapital distributing project funds.

Interestingly, her belief did not rest upon a sound factual account. She was a bit fuzzy on the intervening mechanisms between the visit of senior officials and the outcome. She argued that one of these high ranking officials—it could have been either, she said—phoned Jacqueline Faria, then the Hidrocapital President, to impress upon her the importance that the utility provide an answer to the community's water problems (Interview #49). But she did not claim that the increased competitiveness of the political parties opposed to the Chávez government motivated the decision to distribute resources or that Cabello had a specific interest in mobilizing votes in this neighborhood. Instead, she drew a connection between their visit and what she saw as the inherently benevolent nature of the Chávez government platform. The awarding of project funds, claimed Echeveria, represented part of the government's platform of "governing with the people"; it indicated the fulfillment of a platform promise (Interview #49).

The truth is of course more complex. Just as Hidrocapital had an interest in publicizing a narrative in which it claimed credit for implementing the government's platform, Cabello and Rangel sought to generate electoral mobilization. When Chávez administration officials projected the image of governing with the people, these actions formed part and parcel of its political strategy of securing the votes and creating pro-government strongholds in popular sector neighborhoods (Penfold, 2007). Three years after his first visit to El Rosario-Santa Cruz, for example, Cabello hit the campaign trail to run for the governorship of Miranda. On the road to victory in October 2004, he campaigned in the neighborhood on multiple occasions.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, Cabello's campaign

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<sup>84</sup> Cabello won the gubernatorial race in 2004, defeating incumbent Enrique Mendoza, 51.8% to 48.1%, a difference of 20,000 votes. That vote was held October 2004, a month and half after the August 2004 Presidential Recall Referendum that Chávez survived, winning 59% to 40.6%. Cabello did not win a majority

did not determine state decision-making regarding the project. For example, Chávez approved funds for the Hidroven Community Water Project Financing Fund in August 2005, nearly a year after this electoral event. Moreover, García put down roots in El Rosario-Santa Cruz in 1999, two years before the visit by Cabello and Rangel.

### *Smooth and Segmented Development*

In addition to the substantive difference between these subjects' narratives on the issue of whether the politics of sponsorship or the stewardship of policy underpinned the outcome, the structures of these narratives diverge in another key respect. Echeveria's narrative emphasizes the smooth linear progressions of the chavista political project, as exemplified by the link she drew between the barrio visit of Cabello and Rangel and the approval and funding of Martinez's project. By comparison, Martinez and Sanchez's narrative describes a process of institutional development that unfolded in a segmented sequence.

According to the latter version of events, Hydrocapital prioritized cultivating a social structure of communal leaders in order to establish an institutional ground for interaction. That sequence entailed periods marked by low participation and weak morale. Moreover, during low points, the possibility of a breakdown in communication became real. Thus, if there was a plan, its execution was not seamless, and the plan had to be restarted after overcoming setbacks. One can imagine, for example, that if García had left her post and a new frontline worker had replaced her, then this human resources transition might have undermined the project. The contingency of collective action was that it depended on García's effective stewardship.

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in the municipality of Baruta or in the Las Minas parish, the two encompassing administrative units for Santa Cruz and el Rosario. But he won handily, 69%-31%, out of a total of 1700 votes, in the "*Escuela Basica*" school house voting center where these three community leaders vote (CNE, 2004, <http://www.cne.gob.ve/regionales2004/>).

### *Strategy and Naiveté*

Another key difference between these accounts concerns divergent interpretations regarding the ideals and interests surrounding participation and leadership's representativeness. Echeveria judged her participation to be the result of the political awakening chavista leaders described as the birth of popular power (Hidrocapital, 2008; Interview #49). This idealistic interpretation had important consequences. If she believed that her participation stemmed directly from chavismo, then this shaped her understanding of ongoing processes within the community. For example, she did not seem to fully appreciate the way that her participation, along with that of other female residents, changed the character of the leadership cohort, making it more representative than Martinez's and Sanchez's '*vitalico*' network could have been. This naiveté is understandable in light of Echeveria's normative commitments. If she defined her participation as directly helping Martinez and Sanchez, then it would have also been difficult to conceptualize chavismo's platform as organically eliciting the participation of the excluded and unorganized. As a result, Echeveria might have been forced to reconsider her justification for engagement.

On the other hand, Martinez and Sanchez strategically solicited participation from women. They sought to inject new voices into the group in order to legitimate its representative function in community development for the neighborhood. Their strategy took advantage of Echeveria's normative commitments to chavismo. This maneuvering amounted to something larger than the gendering of participation and the legitimization of leadership. It gave rise to a collectivity Hidrocapital was more disposed to engage. Echeveria's inclusion in the group contributed positively to the representativeness of the leadership cohort as consisting of male and female leaders with experience and ambition, respectively. This strengthened the group's legitimacy by

making members of the collective less vulnerable to criticism they were nothing but an old boys' network—i.e., just *los vitalicios*.

#### IV. Popular Development

In early 2005 García García telephoned Martínez and Sanchez with good news. Their project proposal, which they formally submitted in mid-2004, had received approval from utility engineers on technical grounds. This news implied that a substantial amount of planning about the project had taken place. It meant project engineers had reviewed the community made water census and blueprint of the neighborhood water infrastructure and had completed an independent neighborhood inspection to determine the project's viability on technical grounds. The inspections produced a photo digest of the water service problems, a more complex blueprint of the project, and a rough budget based on project cost estimates. Community leadership and García's work had paid off. Hidrocapital had dedicated resources to planning the project. Community leaders' hopes were raised and they had a much clearer vision of what a project would entail (Hidrocapital, October 18, 2005).

But, the senior management at Hidrocapital could not go beyond approving the El Rosario-Santa Cruz project on technical grounds. They did not control resources to fund a project that fell under the category of non-mandatory investment.<sup>85</sup> State stewardship of the GCA policy programs had resulted in a group for collective action. But creating an organization for community development required a sponsor.


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<sup>85</sup> Hidrocapital spent most of its investment budget on operating the aqueduct and maintaining the water service infrastructure. Repairs fell under the category of maintenance spending but most of the budget was saved for large-scale repairs, such as water main breaks or upgrades to pumping stations. This left little budget flexibility for spending on repairs to small networks.



In May 2005, a sponsor appeared. President Chávez's office phoned Martinez to invite him and Sanchez to the three-day III National Water Congress hosted by Hidroven. As described in detail in Chapter 4, neighborhood leaders from ten of the one hundred and thirteen projects approved for funding made Congress presentations about their projects to Chávez and a public of senior-level government officials and other MTA members. Martinez and Sanchez did not make presentations about their neighborhood project but they attended the Congress plenary session with President Chávez. According to Hidroven's official account of events, the Conference had outlined four main points: 1) "The New Republic, the legal framework, and the New Model of Popular Participation"—as seen by the "co-management" of water services through citizen involvement in "collective decision-making"; 2) The "New Social Structure of the process of the Bolivarian Revolution"—as seen by the *Mesas Técnicas de Agua*; 3) The "Education and Human Development for the Social Transformation of the Sector"—as seen by MTAs becoming promoters of new consciousness about water; and 4) "Potable Water and Socio-Economic Transformation"—as seen by the "meeting of state and society under the institutional framework of "co-responsibility" (Hidroven, May, 2006).


Figure 13: Hidrocapital Project Map of El Rosario-Santa Cruz

**HIDROCAPITAL**  
*Una herramienta de la revolución*

## MEMORIA DESCRIPTIVA

Proyecto: Rehabilitación de las redes de distribución en los 57 Callejones”, en el Sector Barrio El Rosario y Santa Cruz del Este, Municipio Baruta, Edo. Miranda.

### UBICACIÓN



**Sector:** Barrio El Rosario y Santa Cruz del Este.

**Población:** 15.500 Hab.

**Municipio:** Baruta.

**Entidad:** Estado Miranda.

Mesa Técnica del Agua: Consejo Comunitario Las Minas.  
Hidrológica de la Región: HIDROCAPITAL

Situación Actual Servicios Básicos:

Acueducto: Regular


Saneamiento: Deficiente.

Electricidad: Bueno.

Hidrocapital Hidrocan

Ministerio del  
Ambiente y los  
Recursos Naturales

Gobierno  
Bolívariano

  
**Venezuela**  
AHORA ES DE TODOS

*"1805 - 2005 Bicentenario del juramento del Libertador Simón Bolívar en El Monte Sacre"*

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SISTEMA METROPOLITANO  
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[www.hidrocapital.com.ve](http://www.hidrocapital.com.ve)

### *Community Elections*

A month after the Water Congress, Hidroven transferred funds to Hidrocapital and the water utility began drawing up a formal agreement for regulating its interactions with MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz. The project for “Rehabilitation of the distribution networks in the 57 alleys of barrio sectors El Rosario and Santa Cruz del Este, Baruta Municipality, Miranda state” finally seemed to be a reality. In a state media outlet, Hidroven President Ortiz trumpeted the project as the fulfillment of the water sector leadership’s dream of “achieving the shared management—between the technicians and organized communities—of potable water and sanitation services” (Ortiz, 2006, *Ambiente*, 6).

But, who was part of this organized community? The ‘organized community’ consisted of Martinez, Sanchez, Echeveria, and their associates in these individuals’ networks. Thus, three individuals had become Hidrocapital’s main interlocutors without any formal neighborhood election. Martinez, who had been meeting with García more regularly after the Congress, felt compelled to make a public report about the forthcoming project. Hidrocapital made arrangements to facilitate this, calling a meeting García chaired. This gave the event a more formal tone and took pressure off the shoulders of Martinez and Sanchez. Approximately four hundred people attended the first ‘information session’ assembly held at Santa Cruz’s Barbara Rivas School in September 2005. There, García explained what had taken place: Hidrocapital was interested in facilitating the transfer of resources to an MTA, and Martinez and Sanchez were natural candidates to lead this project execution. They had been working with the utility on building such an organizational structure for five years, and had recently received invitations to, and participated at the III Water Congress hosted by Hidroven. Moreover, she noted, they had undertaken the constitutive steps to form an MTA—they had taken a water users’ census, drawn a map of the barrio’s water

infrastructure, and proposed a solution in writing. Nonetheless, to strengthen the standing of Martinez and Sanchez, García suggested a popular election.

A minor neighborhood leadership struggle ensued. Martinez and Sanchez faced off against an unknown group of community leaders in an election Hidrocapital called and held in the same schoolroom where García offered an initial information session about the project. Pro-Chávez and opposition municipal council members attended, along with representatives from Hidrocapital. With the state's endorsement on their side, and after canvassing for votes with megaphones and door-to-door visits, the contest broke down into pro-incumbents versus newcomers: Martinez and Sanchez won a landslide victory (Interview #61).

### *Forming an Organization for Community Development*

The spectacle of holding a contested election generated greater interest in the MTA and broadened awareness of the project. García likely had these objectives in mind when she suggested holding elections. After winning the elections, Martinez and Sanchez were more popular but they did not necessarily enjoy broad acceptance from the residents. They began a kind of listening tour and recruited participants from sixty sectors—a sector is, roughly, an area of approximately five blocks—to serve as what Fernando Delgado, a bookkeeper Sanchez eventually hired, described as “antennas”—receptors of information who would be responsible for attending meetings and checking in with the leadership cohort, staying abreast of the project plans and disseminating this information on their blocks” (Interview #46). The main purpose of holding these listening tour assemblies was to inform the community of what the MTA would be doing (Interview #61). The secondary purposes were recruitment and persuasion. Martinez and Sanchez identified residents interested in assisting with project administration or in employment on the community work crew.

Similarly, they wanted to alert residents to the disruptions construction would cause and ask them to be patient.

Martínez and Sanchez succeeded at recruitment. At the October 18, 2005 “Signing Agreement” assembly organized by Hidrocapital an audience of approximately 100 filled up the small ‘Barbara Rivas’ school-house to observe the formal constitution of the MTA. This involved the public presentation of the MTA’s two official committees: a Technical or Project Committee of fourteen people and an Administrative Committee of eleven. The twenty five MTA committee members signed an agreement that explained their general responsibilities and specific obligations.<sup>86</sup>

Five points mentioned in the Agreement capture the scope of the responsibilities assigned to the MTA: 1) undertake the project, 2) source the labor for the construction crews from local community populations, 3) fulfill the project’s social commitment of water users having to pay a nominal tariff and being good stewards of the project, 4) inform the neighborhood about the progress of the report and pending decisions, and 5) strictly follow the construction guidelines of the project designed by Hidrocapital engineers (Hidrocapital, October 18, 2005). The specific obligations included “maintaining records concerning administrative decisions about the investments,” “submitting a weekly report on spent resources,” “justifying the request for a new disbursement of funds by showing how at least 60% of the previous disbursement was spent,” “submitting a final balance sheet that shows all costs” and the requirement to “use any excess cash for investments in community projects related to housing and habitat after informing Hidrocapital

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<sup>86</sup> The document would have been a valid piece of evidence in court. But, since those who signed the document did not legally constitute their MTA by registering it as a civil society association, the breaching of the agreement would not likely have had the same consequences as breaking a contract. In other words, the agreement was intended more as a framework for quality control than a contract that could be enforced by holding people responsible for their actions.

of these proposals” (Hidrocapital, October 18, 2005). Details were scarce regarding how the MTA was to meet these general responsibilities and specific obligations. This reinforced the agreement’s call to prioritize breaking ground on construction, not procedural details.

To this end, the signing agreement included a program of scheduled activities to be coordinated with the Hidrocapital engineer assigned to the project, Rubén Velasquez. Engineer Velasquez also attended the signing ceremony so the community could recognize him. A month later resources were deposited in the state bank account jointly opened with signatures from Hidrocapital President Alejandro Hatcher and Martinez and Sanchez. Work began in November 2005. Spending generally took two forms. Martinez and Sanchez could authorize small-scale purchases and withdrawals via the ‘*caja chica*,’ the petty cash account. But for larger purchases of heavy construction materials the agreement mandated they seek signatures from the Hidrocapital Presidency (Hidrocapital, Signing Agreement, October 18, 2005).<sup>87</sup>

### *The Decision-Makers*

The group of twenty-seven participants on the administrative and project committees quickly dwindled. The decrease in numbers reinforced the existing pattern, a tight work dynamic between the inner core elite—Martínez, Sanchez, and Echeveria.<sup>88</sup> The trio shared decision-making responsibilities for most of the administrative and construction matters. This was a lot to handle.

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<sup>87</sup> The setting up of a bank account and establishing a work fund followed the same protocol Hidrocapital used for MTA La Pedrera—i.e., 40% of the budget was disbursed at the start and requests for replenishing funds would not be granted until 60% of the disbursed had been spent. The legal department at Hidrocapital approved the same contract template.

<sup>88</sup> This decrease is most visible when comparing the original signing agreement, signed by twenty seven persons, with the act of settlement, signed by four persons (Hidrocapital, October 18, 2005, Hidrocapital, February 13, 2007).

The project awarded a \$4,500 budget line for the cost of buying and transporting 10,000 meters of 25 millimeter-wide pipe and 6000 meters of 50 millimeter-wide pipe in the fifty seven alleyways that serve as the streets throughout Santa Cruz, El Rosario and the lower parts of *Las Minas* (Hidrocapital, October 18, 2005).<sup>89</sup> That Sanchez and Martinez completed the construction along the fifty-seven alleyways efficiently is a credit to two sets of skills: their ability to organize multiple construction crews so that work would take place simultaneously in different neighborhood sectors and their technical knowhow as handy men who could effectively supervise teams of bricklayers, plumbers, and other construction workers. That they completed work along the fifty-seven alleyways while spending two thirds of the budget is a credit to a smart hire. They hired a friend with training as a bookkeeper.

### *The Bookkeeper: Hiring a Specialist*

Fernando Delgado, an *El Rosario* resident who was well acquainted with Sanchez, happened to be unemployed when project execution commenced. Delgado had relevant qualifications for the job of bookkeeper but, more importantly, he had the trust of Sanchez. It also helped Delgado was a lifelong El Rosario resident, knew the community dynamic personally, and had a low profile since he had never been a public community leader.<sup>90</sup> The bookkeeping and accounting position did not exist in the signing agreement. Martinez and Sanchez created it for

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<sup>89</sup> Prices for water pipes tended to either be set by the government or the water utility had a pre-established agreement that the distributor would sell the product sell at a lower cost for community development. In other words, the costs paid by a MTA or Communal Council generally reflected below market rates.

<sup>90</sup> He had received the equivalent of an associate's degree in accounting from the state 'National Institute of Training and Education' (known as 'el INCE'), and had worked on the administrative staff of four-star hotels where he gained experience with keeping track of inventory (González, September 28, 2009). When Delgado took classes at el INCE the institute, founded in 1959, lacked the socialist curriculum it began to incorporate in 2003. With this change in curriculum the institute's name changed to the National Institute for Socialist Training and Education (El INCES).

two reasons. They needed a staff technician for financial matters and they felt overwhelmed by the project's demands. According to Delgado, Sanchez called him within weeks of the project's initiation.

When they received the invoice sheets to fill out order requests, they did not know what to do. Additionally, they did not know how to work a computer and all the sheets are given out on computer software. So he called after three weeks, '*Amigo*, Fernando, I need you to do this,' and I said OK, not completely sure what I was getting into.... At any rate, when I saw the mess they had there I said, 'these guys are crazy, they do not even know how to fill out the sheets and that is a simple thing to do.' Here's another example. They gave me all the receipts after three weeks and I said to them, 'but, wait, this stuff has to be ordered by date'...another thing they did not know. No, really, they are something else, but, each to his own. (Interview #46).

González became a one-man, multidimensional accounting office. He was known as the 'utility player,' a baseball metaphor that local residents used to describe his diverse functions.<sup>91</sup> "I was the one in charge of the administrative part, *the utility man*, the office boy, the one who went to the bank, cashed the MTA's checks, fetched the paychecks of the workers, and I made sure they gave me all the bills and receipts on Friday and Saturday" so that the books and invoices could be submitted to Hidrocapital the following week (Interview #46, my emphasis). At Sanchez's urging, Delgado received more training in accounting. Hidrocapital helped Delgado sign up for public management classes, learn how to work with government budget sheets, and follow procurement rules.

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<sup>91</sup> Baseball is Venezuela's most popular national sport. It is the only South American country that favors baseball over soccer, this in part a cultural legacy of U.S. foreign oil companies playing a large role in shaping the country.



*Project Execution: Getting to Work, Getting Paid*

Within the context of the project, Delgado was a specialized technician and he had significant responsibilities. He earned a higher weekly salary than the directors and the workers, and the workers themselves received compensation at different levels. “I received 5000 *bolivares* (around \$750) a month for this job, and was the only one who received a check. Team members received cash that we took out from the bank. Their pay came from the overall amount we would take out to cover the expenses generated by the fact that it was a community project—the cleaning up, by the community, of the debris, the food, because we provided the workers with a breakfast and lunch, and then on weekends, when more people pitched in for the *sancoche* (a giant stew-like soup)” (Interview #46). The directors received half of Delgado’s salary, 2500 *bolivares* a month and workers, depending on the skill level, received between 1200 (\$190) or 1800 (\$285) a month (Ibid).

Delgado saw this payment structure as normal. To him, the stratification of wages made sense, even if the project constituted “a community job” (Ibid). Those who participated at the rank and file level of the project, such as Eduardo Perez, who worked on Martinez and Sanchez’s work crew, did not express discontent with their level of compensation. He recognized that Delgado shouldered the often-aggravating responsibilities of, for example, sorting out disputes and negotiating prices with part stores (Interview #50).

The first paychecks, paid out after one month, generated great enthusiasm. “We were so happy the first few days, everything was working out nicely, and the community was very happy,” noted Delgado (Interview #46). Delgado’s was astonished at the fact he received direct cash transfers. “I remember saying to Martínez, ‘they are giving *us the money, man*,’” that is, not to the governor’s office and not to the mayor’s office either (Interview #46, my emphasis). Later, they

regretted getting overjoyed about the first paycheck. Martinez, Sanchez and Delgado were robbed after leaving the bank with their first withdrawal of cash. The crime took place as they were in a taxi heading home to Santa Cruz. Men dressed up as off duty members of the Metropolitan Police Department stopped the car and stole all the cash on hand. The robbery prompted Hidrocapital to provide them with a security guard for the next visit to the bank. Subsequently, Delgado decided it better to spend more money on transportation and travel to the bank more frequently so he could withdraw less cash at each visit.

Nevertheless, the direct disbursement meant cutting out the middle levels of bureaucracy, a positive sign, according to Delgado. If the money ‘stopped there,’ he argued, state personnel would have “taken a portion of the funds” (Interview #46, Ibid). Delgado explained:

The President does this [gives money to the MTAs directly] to avoid giving the money to the governors’ offices, regardless of whether they are pro or anti-Chávez. Why not give the money to the mayors? Because he realized, I imagine, I mean, I guess he realized on his own that the bureaucratic process prevents things from making it to the community... so, as an example, if he gives 96,000 *bolivares* to the governor, the governor passes 500 to the mayor, and the community ends up doing the work with only 200. To avoid this, then, he has attempted to empower the people, the communities more than anyone, distributing the resources directly to them. But many people, perhaps because of ignorance, do not do this. If they gave me 96,000 [the amount given to MTA Santa Cruz] to do a community project, that is power for me [as a community]. Because in addition to what was done for the water issue, we also helped many people with their houses, to fix their facades and for people whose houses were really falling apart (Interview #46).

Martinez and Sanchez echoed these points describing private contractors as parasitic. They noted, for example, that contractors who previously worked in the community had dragged their feet and that the middlemen such as parts store owners they dealt with during procurement offered side-payments to the MTA to sweeten their company’s contract proposal (Interview #61). Sanchez and

Martinez favored the community having a direct liaison with the project engineer at Hidrocapital, a person with whom they had more regular contact.

After the MTA purchased the needed materials, construction work began in earnest in January 2006. When functioning at full force, the team involved in construction grew to forty-five, including volunteers (Interview #2). After three months of efficient work, it was clear to Hidrocapital that MTA Santa Cruz could exceed expectations. Describing the work ethic of Martinez and the work crew, Delgado said “these are people that fall flat asleep on the street” because they are so tired when they are done and then they wake and “eat here together in the community together” (Interview #46). Garcia’s progress reported indicated the MTA team was moving along steadily and the engineer reported satisfaction with the technical soundness of the construction (Interview #31).

The utility accepted Martinez’s proposal to expand the project to another fifty-seven streets. Adding these streets was technically feasible; it involved making upgrades on the alleyways in *Las Dalias* and *Calle Union*, the barrios between Santa Cruz at the bottom and El Rosario at the top of the valley. This of course required depositing more money in the bank account, adding \$2500 to the budget (Hidrocapital, ‘Act of Closure,’ February 13, 2007). But Hidrocapital also knew they would be getting more than their money’s worth in this second part because the MTA had already purchased the machinery and materials to undertake the construction. At the request of Sanchez and Martinez, Hidrocapital had allowed the MTA to purchase, instead of rent, these materials, and, most importantly to then keep them as property of the community (Ibid, p. 1). Working faster after having gained experience, the team completed the second fifty-seven streets within the original twelve-month timeframe.

*Figure 14 Distribution Pipes After Project*



These achievements constituted a major victory for Sanchez and Martinez. Yet, the project had a bittersweet conclusion. Martinez expressed disappointment with Hidrocapital for not following through on what he termed the utility President's "promise" to let the "community" administer the water service (Interview #2). In practice, 'community administration' would have consisted of a community-run cooperative managing the master valves and distribution switches. To Sanchez, the cooperative epitomized the ideal of 'popular power'—President Chavez's much-publicized slogan for framing popular participation processes as greater than the sum of their parts. For Sanchez, this ideal would have involved the "community paying a tariff to Hidrocapital, then Hidrocapital providing financial and technical subsidies to strengthen the cooperative, and then the cooperative performing maintenance on the neighborhood infrastructure" (Interview #61). That request was not granted by the state.

## V. Particularistic Political Incorporation

On February 3, 2007 Hidrocapital officials and the Santa Cruz MTA leaders held a ceremony to formally mark the completion of the water project (Hidrocapital, February 3, 2007). Whereas weeks before the MTA had held its post-project inauguration festivities—a party with drinks, food, and dancing—this ceremony was small and quiet. Held at 3:00 PM on "*Calle El Rosario*," the main dirt road in the *El Rosario* barrio, the meeting included the four main actors from the MTA—Martinez, Sanchez, Echeveria, and Adolfo Alvarez—and García and four Hidrocapital officials (President, Metropolitan System Manager, Project Engineer, and the Community Affairs Director).<sup>92</sup> They placed their signatures on a closing agreement document termed the "*Acta de Finiquito*" (Act of Closure). With this, these nine individual affirmed "the

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<sup>92</sup> Adolfo Alvarez was the only member of the leadership cohort I could not locate for a personal interview.

objectives [of the initial contract] were satisfactorily achieved, thus culminating the project as defined” (Ibid, 1).

The official conclusion of the project led to the demobilization of the MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz MTA. The MTA had completed its objective and both Hidrocapital and the MTA leaders moved on to new work. However, after the demobilization of the MTA, relations between state and society did not grow distant. In fact, the opposite happened: Relations between state institutions and the neighborhood grew stronger, with the state ministry for science and technology funding the installation of an “Info-Centro”—a telecommunications community center with computers and other technologies, from phones to fax machines (Interview #49). This was only the most superficial sign of incorporation. The three main leaders—Sanchez, Martinez, and Echeveria—drew on their experience with MTA to embark on new paths. Each of these paths implied greater engagement with chavismo and from these engagements emerged different pathways of political incorporation.

#### *A) Sanchez: Realism and Patronage*

Before I met him Sanchez was described to me as having a realistic outlook on politics. Interviewing him confirmed this. To illustrate the point that his realism was grounded in choices of great consequence he shared with me an anecdote about being approached by the opposition to Chávez. During the initial phases of establishing lines of communication between Santa Cruz leaders and Hidrocapital officials, representatives from the Baruta’s mayor’s offices reached out to Sanchez. The Mayor’s office expressed interest in learning about the community’s water problems and inquired if it could lend a hand (Interview #61). The Mayor’s office had been under control of a succession of opposition administrations. During this period, 2002-2003, Henrique

Capriles, who became the opposition's Presidential candidate in 2012 and 2013, served as Baruta's Mayor.

The people from the Mayor's office called in Hidrocapital. We did a walk-around in the community with them both, Capriles's people and Hidrocapita personnel—García, Yolanda Perez (Metropolitan System chief), and Engineer Ruben Velazquez. We inspected the streets, and began to hold assemblies with the community to create the MTA and select the leaders. We did a few mass public assemblies with Yolanda but not with Capriles—to avoid 'the political.' This dance [avoiding public audiences with Capriles] went on for a number of years.

(Interview #61)

Sanchez's eschewing of Capriles was a calculated decision. Meeting with Capriles, Sanchez told me, would have meant taking the risk of being perceived as pro-opposition. In April 2002, the Chávez government was removed from office in an abortive 48-hour coup. After Chávez returned, Capriles was imprisoned on accusations of fomenting violence outside the Cuban embassy, which is located in Baruta municipality. For Sanchez it was important that Hidrocapital feel comfortable about his political leanings, and thus the decision to exclude the Capriles administration was practically made for him. Maintaining one relationship came at the cost of developing another.

Sanchez broke the matter down. "Brother, all of life is political. Now, political opportunism no, I cannot tolerate that. But, yes, I am definitely a supporter of the policy of the institution [Hidrocapital]"— (Interview #61). With these three points, Sanchez seemed to be saying that 1) political choices are unavoidable in pursuing community development goals, 2) persons who seek to profit from my needs are morally bankrupt but this is common in politics, and 3) the government, specifically, Hidrocapital, developed institutional policies—GCA—that I support. In effect, the emphasis Sanchez placed on point 3 likely meant that if any political opportunism would be tolerated, it would be by officials from Hidrocapital. Meanwhile, his first premise, that all of life is political, gave him reasons to try and manage the *politiquera*, not fight it.

Sanchez experienced two distinctive benefits from his involvement in the water project as a community leader. First, as the project was nearing its conclusion, the Ministry of the Environment, the ministry that housed the water utilities, invited him to travel abroad to attend an international conference. This was his first trip abroad. “I went,” said Sanchez, “with Cristóbal [the Vice-Minister of the Environment and President of Hidroven] and people from the Ministry, to the V Latin American, Ibero-American Conference on Environmental Education,” held in Santa Catarina, Brazil April 5-8, 2006, and “made a presentation about [problems with] the privatization of water” (Interview #61).<sup>93</sup> “The Ministry,” he said, “gave me \$300 dollars and an appointment at the ONIDEX [then the agency for passports and identification cards] where they gave me a passport” (Ibid).<sup>94</sup> Sanchez continued, “after all this [the project, the special treatment he received while traveling on the government’s dime, and the participation at the international Congress], you feel a satisfaction that, man, it is like the sacrifice was really all worth it” (Interview #61).

Second, Sanchez’s sacrifice as a leader and contacts with government officials paid off with a job. After the project’s conclusion, he abandoned neighborhood politics as a community activist and began working his contacts in search of employment. He succeeded and found employment in for the state. Sanchez became a frontline worker as a “social worker” for the Peoples’ Defender Office (a hybrid of the public defender’s office and a citizens’ human rights advocate). In this post, Sanchez’s routine of spending the day “in the street” experienced an

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<sup>93</sup> For more on this Congress, see <http://www.nerea-investiga.org/es/eventos/detalhes/scripts/core.htm?p=eventos&f=detalhes&lang=es&seccao=1&item=9> and <http://www.funiber.org/archivo/2006/funiber-brasil-en-el-v-congreso-iberoamericano-de-educacion-ambiental/>

<sup>94</sup> Sanchez was a bit fuzzy about whether Hidroven followed a defined selection process for inviting him to participate in the Environmental Educators’ Conference. He mentioned being elected by his “peers,” other MTA leaders, at the IV Congress of Community Water Experiences but did not specify how that worked (Sanchez, November 25, 2009). It seems highly plausible that Hidroven selected Sanchez with the progress of the Santa Cruz water service project in mind.



important change of perspective. Thanks to his distinction as a leader, and, of course, the powers of patronage, he became a frontline worker visiting communities to learn about human rights problems and inform under-serviced community members about the agency's legal and social services (Interview #61).<sup>95</sup>

*B) Martinez: From Licensed Critique to Campaign Surrogate*

After the project ended Martinez changed careers, leaving behind neighborhood leadership to become a kind of community development consultant. He formed a cooperative with Hidrocapital's legal assistance team and worked with other MTAs and Communal Council-administered community water projects. Later, he leveraged his credibility as a recognized MTA activist to gain employment working for national-level political campaigns.

Martinez showed signs of having an independent streak. His independence amounted to non-conformism, which is different from open dissent. He claimed MTA Santa Cruz had strengthened neighborhood identity and provided a vehicle for collective action on an unprecedented scale. In short, Martinez's victories were hard won and he defended them as the fruits of efforts he coordinated along with other MTA leaders and under García's guidance. He did not resist the state or dissent from chavismo. But, rather, he defended the integrity of a process started in Santa Cruz-El Rosario.

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<sup>95</sup> For logistical and scheduling reasons, interviewing Sanchez was very difficult. Once he took on the new job, the regularity of his contact with Echeveria and Martinez decreased. I interviewed him in my last month of field work.

On Saturday, October 11, 2008, Hidrocapital's Metropolitan System (Caracas and the Metropolitan Caracas area) held a daylong symposium to mark the 'Fifth Regional Congress of MTA Experiences for the Caracas Metropolitan Area' (Personal Observation, October 11, 2008).<sup>96</sup> The symposium was attended by utility officials and MTA groups from all over Caracas, not only those that had received funding or were currently funded. It took place amid the launching of electoral campaigns for the Caracas Mayoral races. The elections, held a month later, featured prominently at the Water Congress.

The event program listed three sessions: a morning session headlined by speeches from the Hidrocapital President and from Jorge Rodriguez and Aristubulo Isturiz, mayoral candidates from Chávez's PSUV party for the Libertador Municipality and the Metropolitan Mayor's office, respectively; a second session of working group discussions to three themes set by Hidrocapital: electoral strategy, popular power and the Socialist Commune, and "MTA experiences: The Social-Productive Business and Ethics as a Socialist Value" (Personal observation, Hidrocapital, October 11, 2009); and the third and final session consisted of presentations by MTA leaders, with Martinez as panelist.

Before the sessions began, Martinez and four friends from the MTA made a subtle but noticeable symbolic statement with their clothing. In contrast to almost all the other 250 or so attendees who changed from street clothes and put on commemorative red shirts handed out to

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<sup>96</sup> The water utility tried to hold these Regional Congresses yearly. In some years, a regional and national Congress took place. In 2008 only Regional Congresses took place. If there was enough funding, Hidrocapital's four other regional systems held their own Congresses. The format and content of the symposium was the same at the different utility systems. Holding them on a regional basis was simply more convenient for the staff and for the MTA members, since it meant they had to travel a shorter distance than if the event were held in Caracas. I attended the Fifth Regional Congress of MTA Experiences for the Vargas Littoral area weeks before the Caracas Metropolitan event.

them by Hidrocapital officials, the Santa Cruz group did not change shirts. They accepted the red shirts as gifts but declined the implicit request to wear them as *de facto* official symposium uniforms. Instead they wore self-designed navy blue t-shirts emblazoned with an emblem for the *Santa Cruz del Este* MTA. During the speeches by the mayoral candidates, their blue shirts stuck out in a sea of red—the official color of the PSUV party.<sup>97</sup>

*Figure 15, Candidate Isturiz, Capital Region Congress of MTAs*



<sup>97</sup> Neither speech placed the issues of water or the MTAs at the center of their remarks. Instead, they offered their stump speeches ahead of the November 2008 'Regional Elections.' Isturiz, the candidate for Metropolitan Mayor, seemed the more likely of the two to address the topic of the MTAs. As Libertador Mayor from 1992-1995, Isturiz's 'Governing from the Parish' initiative had helped give birth to the prototypes of the Mesas Técnica de Agua, and he personally knew the long-time frontline workers Victor Diaz and Santiago Arconada.

In a private interview after the event Martinez voiced displeasure about the politicians' presence (Interview #2). Sanchez shared this view, saying that although he had not attended this Congress, he heard about these developments and noted "that [the presence of PSUV candidates] did not look good" in terms of the infiltration of '*la politiquera*' into Hidrocapital's relationship with the MTAs (Interview #61). Delgado argued that inviting politicians to the Congress could scare away "normal people who do not like politics," not to mention pro-opposition citizens (Interview #46).<sup>98</sup>

González explained that they had commissioned the blue shirts during the construction phase of the project. The shirts, he said, had two purposes. On the one hand, wearing them helped identify and distinguish the MTA as a professional work crew while it performed construction in the community. On the other hand, he pointed out that Martinez believed appearances made a big difference. A neutral color, like navy blue, which no Venezuelan political party had adopted as its symbolic color, could help the group appear neutral in partisan battles. The irony, Delgado noted, "was that we wanted to project the idea that the MTA was not *partyfied*, when it in fact was" (Interview #46). What he meant was that MTA members were all chavistas private citizens—they all cast their ballots for chavismo, he claimed. "All of us were chavistas.... well not everyone was to the same degree, Patricio [a volunteer from neighboring barrio *El Coromoto*] was not at first, and there were others that did not belong, but afterwards they all came over to our side, to be with us," that is, to be parts of chavismo (Interview #46).

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<sup>98</sup> Another symposium attendee who I interviewed after the event told me he believed the MTAs and PSUV party were one and the same. This individual, who was also a panelist, did not have a background in MTA organizing. Instead he was a PSUV militant and when I interviewed him, he insisted we conduct the interview underneath a mobile tent set up by the PSUV party as one of its '*punta rojas*' (mobile office 'red tents') for distributing campaign literature and propaganda to voters.

“When we went to a march [for Chávez], when you saw the blue group, you could see us: there we went, moving along there, you could see us on the television. Then you see all those red people there, the ‘sheep’ walking there. Us, no, we distinguished ourselves apart, in order to not be stuck in that the ‘red, deeply red’” style of politics (Interview #46).

*Figure 16, Juan Martinez, Regional Community Water Council, 2010<sup>99</sup>*



Martinez’s speech during the day’s final session ignored the highly ideological themes of the day, popular power and the Socialist Communes, and he skipped electoral issues (Hidrocapital,

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<sup>99</sup> I also participated as an invited observer at Hidrocapital’s 2010 Community Water Council. Juan Martinez wore the same t-shirt to the 2008 and 2010 Forums but I only snapped a photo of him at the latter.

October 11, 2009).<sup>100</sup> He focused on how efforts at mobilization required patience and benefitted from the steady guidance provided by García.<sup>101</sup> Juan Martinez explained that the t-shirt incident should not be interpreted as a signal of opposition to the PSUV or of support for another party friendly to the opposition. Instead, the distinctively blue t-shirts, which, of course, were purchased with state money, signaled they were the keepers of the process. The t-shirt incident did not elicit a government backlash. Instead, MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz's licensed critique was tolerated in so far as Juan Martinez maintained his network of government contacts.<sup>102</sup>

### *Serving as Surrogate for Chavismo*

Three years after the Congress Juan Martinez wore a different blue shirt for an on camera interview with a pro-government state television channel—*Venezolano de Televisión* (Venezuelan Television, VTV)—to announce his role as an organizer for the *Gran Polo Patriótico*, a pro-government political party alliance—an electoral organizing effort involving social movements, collectives, grassroots organizations and small alternative political parties. The GPP mobilized

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<sup>100</sup> Electoral strategy did not refer to a debate about whether MTAs should participate in political strategy. Instead it referred to how the PSUV candidates would campaign and how the MTAs should facilitate the electoral chances for the candidates of this “revolutionary process,” as many of the discussion leaders described it. The second theme of discussion addressed the ideological issues of defining peoples’ power and thinking about what a Socialist Commune would entail. The frontline officials challenged attendees to write down a definition of people's power and offer reasons why the continued expression of organized community groups would advance the revolution. Discussion among MTA members did not really follow these cues. Conversations centered on pragmatic matters such as: the only way to get results is to exert pressure on the institutions through organizations (like the MTAs). The third theme of discussion did not generate much interest. Persons mostly exchanged experiences since no one could figure out what a social productive business really was. When the facilitator tried to get participants to focus, asking that the group address ‘Socialist Ethics,’ most people uttered platitudes about treating others equally (Personal observations, October 11, 2008).

<sup>101</sup> He also highlighted the government assistance Santa Cruz-El Rosario had recently received through *La Mision 13 de April*—an initiative aimed at barrio infrastructure improvement. The fundamental point was to inspire a sense of possibility about the fruitfulness of GCA policy programs.

<sup>102</sup> Though there are considerable differences between Venezuela's Chavismo and Syria's Assad regime, my attempt to situate the MTA Santa Cruz's symbolic politics profited greatly from Lisa Wedeen's discussion of the power relations that permeate “Signs of Transgression” in Assad's Syria to make sense of this event (Wedeen, 1999).



votes for Chávez for the October 7, 2012 presidential elections ('D'Frente,' VTV, October 28, 2011).<sup>103</sup> Within the GPP structure, Martinez headed the Oriente (Eastern) region 'Socialist Front of *Mesas Técnicas de Agua*.' A month before the interview, Alejandro Hitcher, Minister of the Environment and still-acting Hidrocapital President, swore this 'Front' of the GPP into formal existence (AVN, August 11, 2011, "*Mesas Técnicas de Agua han recibido más de Bs. 500 millones para proyectos*"). In shifting from volunteering for and leading the MTA to working for electoral mobilization, politics became more of a profession than a vocation for Martinez.

### C) Echeveria: From Chavista Loyalist to Broker

By 2008 Echeveria had become the linchpin of Communal Council *La Union*, of Santa Cruz. She stored the construction equipment for the CC work crew in her home. Her residence became the Council's operational home. From her kitchen she regularly hosted government officials visiting the neighborhood to inspect projects or to update her about plans for new ones. Echeveria had professed herself to be "the most political" of the MTA leadership and her actions confirmed this (Interview #49). In this context, 'most political' meant she took pleasure from being in command and exercising a kind of power. Echeveria capitalized on her exposure to state officials as an MTA leader. She attracted the attention of state officials who first promoted the CCs in Santa Cruz. For example, Hidrocapital invited her to classes on how to organize a CC offered by a state Foundation for Education and Social Management (FEGS). This gave her an advantage as the most knowledgeable member of the Council. Then, while running the Council, she petitioned a PSUV official to help the group facilitate connections with government officials (Interview #49).

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<sup>103</sup> Correo del Orinoco, October 28, 2011, "*Esperan registrar en Oriente más de 2 mil movimientos sociales en Gran Polo Patriótico*," <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/politica/esperan-registrar-orientem-2-mil-movimientos-sociales-gran-polo-patriotico/>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDMMYJ04kYw>; Correo del Orinoco, October 28, 2011

Echeveria defended her actions openly. “The Communal Councils,” she told me, are “political” but the MTA “was born out of a response to the community’s needs” (Interview #49). For her, political meant top-down. The CCs implied the expansion of the system’s political space to include local-level participation. And since Echeveria interpreted the government and state institutions as one and the same, this expansion included the PSUV party penetrating barrio spaces. This became apparent when the Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Public Works and Infrastructure (MOPVI), Jose Gregorio Alvarado, paid a surprise visit to Santa Cruz to promote *Mision Barrio Tri-Color*.<sup>104</sup>

Alvarado’s arrival in the community generated an audience of around one hundred people in a local health clinic. He used the wall to project a power point presentation. The presentation explained 1) how MOPVI would be providing the materials for this housing repair Mission, 2) that the Communal Councils from the zone would select the projects to be undertaken based on citizen demands and also recruit and select community workers for the mission, and 3) that the Minister of the Communes would follow-up to coordinate the organization of Communal Councils for residents that did not have an organizational structure through which to make demands.<sup>105</sup>

Elenitza Guevara attended the meeting as part of Alvarado’s MOPVI staff. Echeveria introduced me to her. Guevara explained to me the dual institutional and political tasks she had at MOPVI. “I am a lawyer—from 9-4 PM, I am the notary for Diosdado (then the MOPVI minister), and after 4 PM for the rest of the day, I work for the party” (Interview #51). This fusion of roles made sense in light of her employer’s occupations. Her boss, Diosdado, had been appointed Vice-President of the PSUV for the Central-Western Region of the country while serving as Minister of

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<sup>104</sup> *Mision Barrio Tri-Color* is a state-funded self-help social assistance program in which the government provides homeowners the resources and materials to fix up their homes and paint them the colors of the yellow, blue and red Venezuelan flag—known colloquially as the ‘tri-color.’

<sup>105</sup> Military officials were to set up and man the tents where building materials would be stored.



MOPVI. Guevara explained that her office's role at MOPVI was split into defensive and offensive actions on behalf of the PSUV. Her review of citizen petitions for infrastructure projects included doing due diligence with party higher ups to see if the petitioner belonged to the party or not. This, she said, helped protect PSUV members from discriminated against by MOPVI personnel unaffiliated with the party (Interview #51). Meanwhile, she said, "we looked for a way to get around certain problems because we cannot engage in political proselytism. So we created a tri-partite structure, our group here in the *sala tecnica*, another group called 'citizen affairs,' and the representatives to the *Salas de Batalla Social* (Assemblies for Ideological Struggle) who are PSUV personnel. This way we can make sure news about programs gets to our militants first" (Interview #51). Guevara claimed that her efforts were part of a pilot project Cabello wanted to eventually implement nationally. She also tried to hedge, saying that none of these practices meant "leaving people from the opposition out;" it only meant they had a lower priority (Interview #51). Guevara was most likely being diplomatic when she described opposition demands as having secondary importance.

Guevara was one of Echeveria's contacts within the emerging party-state structure. She ensured that Echeveria, a member of the PSUV, received timely updates about state programs. This helped Echeveria become an even better community leader. It allowed her to make preparations to receive assistance from government programs and to align her message with the policies of the government. It also, of course, helped her to become a gatekeeper who could control the flow of information and other resources between the barrio and the state.

## Conclusions

MTA Santa Cruz's success story generated interest both about the group's leaders and the neighborhood as a place where progress was being made. It caught the attention of media outlets

interested in casting chavismo's relationship with the poor in a positive light. For example, in 2007 Martinez and Echeveria relayed their story about the popular sector's relationship with chavismo to Barbara Walters and an on site team from ABC News. The news story reported that community support for Chávez stemmed from the positive ripple effects of the potable water service project (Martin Clancy, ABC News 20/20, March 15, 2007).<sup>106</sup>

The ABC news story did not address important limitations of the project experience. The project's closing agreement contained a clause that made reference to the MTA members' 'social commitment.' Though just what this meant was not clearly spelled out, it included two elements—to have water users pay a nominal tariff fee, and to promote environmental standards to maintain the quality of the new infrastructure. But this was a voluntary commitment. Hidrocapital did not make an observable attempt to either enforce the nominal tariff or to meter the system. The overwhelming majority of residents continued to not pay for water service (Interview #46). Revenue collection of some kind was an important missing link in post-project interactions between the neighborhood and Hidrocapital.

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<sup>106</sup> The ABC news story claims the reporter chose Santa Cruz del Este without government input. Even if this is true, which cannot be independently confirmed, the fact is that Santa Cruz del Este, and Juan Martinez and Echeveria, were each well-known because of the successful implementation of the potable water project. It is highly unlikely ABC news selected Santa Cruz randomly. The ABC news transcript of the interview Walters conducted with Chávez is here: <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2013/03/reporters-notebook-barbara-walters-rare-interview-with-hugo-chavez/> (accessed May 8, 2013). Video footage is available here via this link to the archived news, posted after Chávez died March 5, 2013: <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2013/03/reporters-notebook-barbara-walters-rare-interview-with-hugo-chavez/> (accessed May 8, 2013).

**Figure 29. National Population of *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (MTAs)—Hidrocapital, 2009**

2001	100 MTAs
2002	300 MTAs
2003	960 MTAs
2004	1601 MTAs
2005	2658 MTAs
2006	3200 MTAs
2007	4780 MTAs
2008	6600 MTAs

*The Path Dependency of Leadership*

Moreover, the story did not critically examine the scope of participation or the three leaders' pathways to incorporation—patronage for Sanchez, surrogacy for Martinez, and a relationship of brokerage between the PSUV party and Echeveria. I argued the utility's reliance on established leaders with strong interpersonal skills needs to be understood as part of the utility's efforts to practice the art of the possible. On the one hand, this practice can be linked with favoritism in the form of cronyism or pork-barrel spending. For example, such dependence may have made officials prone to expending energies and allocating financial resources to a neighborhood based on *compadrazgo*—a frontline worker's locally-situated friendships—rather than based on objective criteria concerning the quality of service or social conditions. Likewise, if Hidrocapital officials tended to strike up relationships with the residents who stepped forward, they were likely to be recruiting pro-Chávez individuals. It was very common for polarization over Chávez to divide communities, with pro-government segments being prone to engage with the

state and anti-government segments opposed to or disinterested in such proposals (Hawkins, 2010).

However, it bears asking, what were frontline workers supposed to do? Compared with the option of selecting people at random, recruiting established leaders made sense. The alternatives to working with already visible leaders were worse. Before resources for community development became more widely available in 2006, the supply of activism was much lower and, as a result, barely organized groups like the core group in Santa Cruz-El Rosario stood out as if they were much more organized. Thus, where society was pregnant with leadership potential the incentives for working with these individuals were too great to forego this option. With policy developing gradually, initial gains became central to building momentum. In this context, success meant putting one foot in front of the other. Furthermore, progressing required establishing a social basis for institutional ties. For Hidrocapital, following the sequence of cultivating a social structural basis to establish institutional grounds for interaction had costs and benefits. Developing direct relationships represented a potential cost for Hidrocapital insofar as policy implementation depended heavily on a small group of persons. At the same time, the scenario of re-presenting the state through community leaders was highly preferable to the alternative of not having a foundation, of any kind, for establishing an institutional ground.

Overall, then, the ABC news account possessed an important grain of truth. But it could not do justice to the history of the MTA or the complexity of popular development as an outcome that was different from community development because it implied the centrality of technical and social processes. Moreover, the reporters needed a story about the bottom-up nature of chavismo and in this regard they were not about to probe into the community's entanglements with chavismo and how these stemmed from via the MTA's relationship with state institutions.

In his narrative of why Chávez succeeded in cultivating local support, Delgado described the MTA as an “intermediary” that served the function of linking community and state (Interview #46). Sanchez echoed this message of interdependency. “One thing implies the other,” he said about the MTA and the state, when I asked how to define the MTA. With this observation he refused to define the MTA as an independent organization and argued that an MTA’s formation and function implied an essential role for the state (Interview #61). In this vein, Martinez and Sanchez made specific mention of García’s contribution to their efforts to mobilize a MTA. To be sure, they did not leave Chávez out. Said Martinez, “when the President first started telling the people to ‘organize yourselves,’ because that ‘is the only we have to get out of poverty’ that made a difference....That really helped make my work easier in the community” and, “it made it really possible for Hidrocapital to get things done” since residents could frame the utility’s work within the broader political context (Interview #2).

The inconvenient truths of this story regarding the prominent role of the state and a few community leaders did not need to be in the ABC story. But they needed to be central here in order to fully understand what popular development entails as a process of collective action conditioned by state institutions and shaped by political processes. Describing this complex of conditions as generative of the process by which an initially precarious relationship between state and society evolved into an institutionally mediated relationship between an MTA group and the government has some important implications for thinking about what underpins effective collective action and what such collective action entails.

First, beyond Peattie's point that development requires a working segment and a sponsor, I have argued that popular development requires both the support of an institutional process that encourages a particular structure of community mobilization and leadership practices that help

make it possible to realize opportunities and protect the integrity of a process's principles. Second, beyond Mansuri and Rao's important point that a cooperative infrastructure presupposes functional state institutions, I have argued that politics did make an important difference to powering mobilization at the bottom, even if it mostly operated in the background during the formative periods of collective action. In short, chavismo's project not only offered material incentives to participate but also symbolic incentives for collective action to gain meaning as a locally situated but nationally relevant process. Third, in painting a picture that helps us draw a distinction between community and popular development, I have challenged research to consider the possibility that there exists a medium range outcome between technocratic economic progress and fully democratic development. Popular development helps capture some of the best aspects of what grassroots development can be when the local institutional context is less than democratic.

“The New P.D.V.S.A. [the Venezuelan state oil company] is red, red all the way through.”

Rafael Ramírez, Energy Minister and President of P.D.V.S.A, December, 2006

“Ours must be a Party that establishes cadres and that, according to Antonio Gramsci’s view, penetrates the masses, the multitudes. Like dissolving sugar, the Party should be able to dissolve itself in the larger mass, i.e., the people. Instead of imposing itself on the people it submits itself to it.... There is a difference between mass and multitude... A mass grows but carries within itself its own end. It may disappear from one moment to the next. Not so with the multitude. A mass organized into multitudes should have orientation, impetus, leadership, and moral force to move it forward”

Hugo Chávez, “About the utmost importance of a party” Unified Socialist Party’s Foundational Address, March 24, 2007, in *Diplomacy, Strategy, & Politics* — April/June 2007, p. 216).

“5,591 Committees for the ‘Yes’ vote in the whole country....Communal Councils, Urban Land Committees, Technical Water Committees, Technical Telecommunications Committees, Communal Banks, Technical Energy Committees, Alternative Media Outlets, and other Popular Organizations form part of the ‘Yes Committees’ working in solid support of the Constitutional Amendment.”

Advertisement Signed by “Communal Power” Committee for the Yes Vote (Regarding Amendment to Ban Term Limits), in Ultimas Noticias, Friday January 9, 2009.

## Ch. 6: Chavismo Transformed: State-Sponsored Partisanship, Party-Building, and the Organizational Limits of Chavismo’s Populism

Commonly, an election outcome is measured by the margin of victory. But, the objective vote shares won by candidates is just one measure. A comprehensive assessment of an election's outcome needs to center an election's subjective significance. Indeed, despite claims that elections are translations of voters’ interests into votes, the politicians decide what message they would like to hear. In this respect, post-election speeches are crucial for tracking how the main actors interpret the campaign and the messages sent at the polls. They provide important insights into how candidates perceived voters’ messages. For example, the arguments winners and losers weave together about the election results shed light on how they understand their governing mandate and how may establish a basis for contestation going forward, respectively.

In his victory speech after handily winning the 2006 Presidential election—63% to 37%—incumbent Hugo Chávez claimed a big mandate. He announced the formation of a new party, the *Partido Socialista Unitario de Venezuela* (The Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV). Chávez intended the PSUV to absorb his electoral party *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (Fifth Republic Movement, MVR), the organizational tool chavismo employed—more or less exclusively—at election time. In announcing the PSUV’s formation, Chávez issued a call for this new partisan initiative to bring together competing factions.

In the 2006 election, as in previous contests, Chávez ran at the head of a coalition—the *Polo Patriotic* (Patriotic Pole). But, with the birth of the PSUV Chávez promised to end *ad-hoc* alliances with non-PSUV partners, such as the historical *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (Communist Party of Venezuela, PCV). In fact, Chávez threatened allied parties—including the PCV—that unless they joined the PSUV he would consider them parts of the opposition (LAWR-06-50, December 16, 2006). Chávez attempted to justify this hardline position by arguing he alone was responsible for the coalition’s votes. “I have heard,” Chávez said, “some people saying that their party won so many votes (on December 3) but let’s not lie, those votes belong to Chávez” (LAWR-06-50, Ibid).<sup>107</sup> The idea that votes belonged to Chávez, not any collective leadership structure operating under organizational auspices, rang true. Support for parties as institutions remained very low while vote preference was highly correlated with approval or disapproval of

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<sup>107</sup> In fact, Chávez had to reverse on his hardline position regarding other parties integration into the PSUV. After the PCV, and other small Left-wing groups, resisted the terms Chávez proposed, the President backtracked and continued to strike coalition agreements with pro-government parties when electoral mobilization consumed the government’s agenda. Moreover, Chávez backpedaled on the PSUV party’s name, making a subtle word change from the Unified to United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Chávez was slightly chastened by these events. Frankly, he should not have been too surprised by the Left’s ‘resistance.’ The radical Left had a forty-year history of working at the fringe of the system. Their maintenance of an alternative, independent identity in fact represented their main means for surviving.



Presidential leadership. Consequently, identification as ‘chavista’ (or not) mattered the most for vote shares (Gil Yepes, 2011, 25-32).

Paradoxically, this trend of personalistic support presented Chávez with a major challenge. Building a party that would fulfill electoral and organizational objectives seemed to imply the distribution of a degree of power throughout an organizational apparatus. But, Chávez seemed unwilling to share decision-making authority or credit, for that matter. This meant Chávez sought to expand his movement’s capacity to organize but he resisted party-building’s implication of a transition from autocratic to oligarchic rule that would convert chavismo from a completely personalistic to a marginally collectivist political movement (Slater, 2010, 134). This tension had existed since chavismo came to power. But, since chavista governors and government officials accepted the indispensability of Chávez’s rule, a few exceptions notwithstanding, the consequences did not seem especially grave.<sup>108</sup> In this sense, what changes did the advent of party building produce for chavismo beyond new conditions for forming chavista political coalitions?

### *State-Sponsored Partisanship, Organization, and Councils’ Centrality*

Although it did not weaken Chávez’s personalistic control, the advent of party building did constitute a key turning point for patterns of organization shaping state-society relations. Specifically, party building marked the beginning of organizing efforts aimed explicitly at cultivating partisan loyalties for a party organization. It is important to underscore a distinction between empirically related but analytically distinct processes associated with partisanship. The creation of the PSUV from the state symbolized the transition from state-based partisanship into

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<sup>108</sup> Chávez’s autocratic style did represent an existential threat. How, for example, would chavismo manage charismatic leadership succession? This proved to be a critical question when Chávez succumbed to cancer in 2013. But in 2006 personalism did not pose a concrete challenge to the goal of organization.

state-sponsored expressions of party loyalty in society. Moreover, the transition was more than symbolic. It implied important changes because it took place in a context marked by already existing organizational processes.

Chavez's movement, in the beginning, was responding to the bankruptcy of Punto Fijo democracy—a system in which parties had been not just parts, but all of the political system, in a sense suffocating both society and state rather than mediating between them (Coppedge 1994). Chavismo's populist period, 1999-2007, was one in which both state and society got affirmed over and against party forms. This period contained two patterns, both of which were marked by more creative (but also somewhat unpredictable) forms of intermediation. The first pattern had to do with building a foundation, that is, reconstituting state-society relations after the pattern of party-mediated state-society relations that characterized Punto Fijo collapsed. Chapter 3 told a story about Hidrocapital's role in contributing to the reconstitution of state-society through its implementation of Community Water Management policy programs in the Caracas water sector. Chapter 4 told a story about the overlapping nature of mobilization and organization in the context of state supported for community development and chapter 5 illustrated what that multidimensional process entailed through the example of MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz. Party-building thus took place in this interesting space - one where people are both drawn to and resistant to formalization of intermediation. It built on other forms of organization, rather than other forms emerging from the party agenda.

With multiple organizational settings facilitating different collective action processes, chavismo pursued a two-tiered strategy—the party was built on the back of a pattern of state-sponsored partisan spirit expressed through the Councils and associated communal spaces. Though these processes overlapped temporally and spatially, understanding the sequence of their

emergence reveals crucial insights. Unpacking this order helps grasp the interactive elements and the most notable implications for chavismo's evolution from a case of populism to one involving a party-state marked by the rise of a state party—a party whose main constituency for mobilization and candidate recruitment is drawn from the ranks of the state.

The trend of channeling partisan loyalty partisanship through state institutions formed a key part of chavismo's governance beginning in 2002-2004—the period when the government prominently branded social assistance plans titled 'Missions' as chavista programs and when partisanship exclusively referred to loyalty to Chávez (Penfold, 2007; Hawkins, 2010). The emergence of efforts to mold these loyalties into forms of organized support characterized the 2005-2007 period marked by mass mobilization. This process gained coherence gradually. State mobilization of partisan spirit through the Councils first began in 2005 and such expressions gained a distinctive shape in 2006 and 2007. The process was marked by the drawing of boundaries around fragments of collective action underpinned by their direct linkages to chavismo as the governing party. Enclosing these fragments into a more coherent formation took place in electoral and non-electoral contexts when government communication campaigns set these examples against a contrasting formation—an image of civil society that diverged from what Chávez considered base-level organizing. In effect, chavismo displaced a political cleavage onto civil society, attempting to create a stark contrast between pro- and anti-government organization (Handlin, 2008).

The PSUV political party was a salient actor in political contestation before Chávez invested organizational resources to build it in 2008—the first year the party ran candidates after holding party primaries. It did not exert control over societal processes until 2010, but it was organizing and recruiting support by other means. When party building efforts commenced,

coherent expressions of partisan spirit existed by way of state support for organs of Communal Power—groups that captured the cleavage between chavista and non-chavista organization. These helped lay the groundwork for Chávez’s effort to accomplish a more complete overhaul of state-society relations through interfaces between state officials and community leaders, some of whom become state employees. As a result, a key base of the PSUV party was made up of the occupants of this interface.

There are two principal values of delineating these layers of intermediation and analyzing them as in a kind of dynamic dialogue with one another. First, it helps us understand why the PSUV can be understood as Chávez’s party as well as a distributed manifestation of chavismo. Second, it helps us to make a crucial but difficult to establish distinction between populism and party building. This analysis provides critical insights for differentiating between populism as a process of mass mobilization that molds groups into loyal political constituencies and party-building as a process of channeling collective action into predictable behavior through recruitment of local brokers and rank-and-file members.

### *Roadmap*

The first section establishes two key analytic distinctions for following the argument. The second section analyzes the main developments that either helped establish conditions for how state-sponsored partisanship emerged from or directly captured other developing processes. The third section illustrates the way that partisanship penetrated the Caracas water sector and its consequences for Hidrocapital-managed relationships with MTAs and community development more broadly. The fourth section examines the impact of these broader trends at the base level by analyzing three examples of state-society relations. The conclusion retraces the institutional trajectory of Venezuelan state-society relations under chavismo, and discusses why populism is an advantageous analytic framework for studying this mass political movement as well as others.

## I. Between Partisanship and Party and Organizing and Organization

To fully comprehend the implications of party building taking place within the overlapping organizational patterns of different intermediation processes, it is crucial to establish two key distinctions—1) between partisanship and party, 2) between organizing and an organization. First, partisanship refers to political action of a distinctively partisan character, such as a relation that directly expresses a spirit of devoted or zealous support for a cause or person (Oxford English Dictionary, "partisanship, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web., 21 January 2016). It entails a style of politics marked by efforts to narrowly defend a position or support a particular political organization's interests over other organizations and affirm this organization over some broader collectivity. Partisanship does not depend on the existence of either a strong party or a consolidated party system, though it is more visible when these are present. Put differently, partisanship can be a particularly relevant element of political contestation in contexts where parties do not exercise organizational power, as was the case in Venezuela throughout the Chávez period under review, 2000-2010 (Molina, 2004; Arenas and Gómez Calcaño, 2005; Hawkins, 2010). Where parties are weak, but a movement—such as *chavismo*—is strong, the key issues for partisanship likely concern identification of the person or causes that attracts adherents and proponents and the modes for expressing support for the person or cause.

This brings us to the distinction between organizing and an organization, a group which implies a specific setting for defining the organization's identity and a defined set of rules for establishing membership and roles. A process of organizing is distinct from a process of mobilization. The former involves creating an orderly whole out of what the latter produces—a process of collective action that features a molecular mass of people. Creating this orderly whole

entails establishing categories of membership and elaborating a meaning-making framework through which ties among members can be more clearly defined and articulated (Tilly, 1978, 63). For example, to assess ‘how organized’ a group is it can be useful to consider things like the differentiation of rules, the centralization of decision-making, and the stratification of statuses (Tilly, 1978, 64). Thus, researching organizing means examining the basic structure of collective action processes on a sliding scale defined by fluidity and stability at the poles with shifting combinations of more and less predictable behaviors.

For Venezuela’s *chavismo*, the distinction between organizing and an organization can be illustrated by examining the differences between the most central and visible organizational processes *chavismo* orchestrated from power and through the state. Literature from party politics helps illuminate the key points. Kitschelt characterizes the transition from movement to movement party “as one in which political entrepreneurs change the institutional setting in which they operate and make investments in an organizational infrastructure of collective action as well as procedures of social choice that create collective preference schedules (‘party programs’)” (Kitschelt, 2006, 278). Orchestrating such a transition commonly involves leaders intentionally signaling the importance of the party as the preferred site for collective action. However, such signaling does not mean all the action shifts to this setting—not right away, at least. It only means that party-building becomes the most visible organizational process, while continuing to coexist with other forms and processes of organization. For example, as I demonstrate below, Chávez’s signaling of his intention to build a party did not relegate promotion of Communal Councils to a peripheral role. On the contrary, Council organizing remained central through 2010, and moreover, the spaces opened by efforts to mobilize collective action in Councils and organize their behaviors through routines provided key interfaces for party building.

## II. Partisanship from Above: Escalated Chavista Control over the State

The most visible sign of intensified efforts to promote partisanship from the state emerged via a political scandal. In 2006 Rafael Ramirez, then the President of the Venezuelan State-owned oil company PDVSA and the country's Energy Minister, was secretly recorded making controversial remarks. Speaking to a private assembly of PDVSA workers in the company's headquarters, Ramirez suggested that any efforts to sabotage government oil production plans would fail because the "New PDVSA"—that is, PDVSA under Chávez—is "*rojo, rojito*" (red, red all the way through). Ramírez's comments, made in the final days before the 2006 Presidential election, were not disclosed until an employee leaked them in 2007. The video went viral online.<sup>109</sup> By 2005 Chávez had appropriated red as the signal color of his movement's leftwing platform, and, as anticipated, red became the PSUV's color. Ramírez's remarks, which amounted to an implicit threat to public employees—i.e., demonstrate public support or risk being fired—represented the most blatant example of a chavista official asserting partisanship through the state.

### *Communal Power: A Framework for Partisanship at the Base*

In January 2007, one month after his commanding victory in the 2006 elections, Chávez undertook an effort to reengineer the constitutional framework. The need to redesign the Constitution was urgent, Chávez claimed, because the government's new six-year 'Simon Bolívar Development Plan' (2007-2013) required a different set of institutional tools. In a highly publicized January 17, 2007 speech titled "Communal Power: Soul of a Revolutionary

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<sup>109</sup> The incident resulted in a fine for Ramírez for political proselytization in a state workplace. The country's electoral authority did not issue a penalty for a public official making a veiled threat to public employees or creating a coercive environment for freedom of speech (Noticias24, July 13, 2007, <http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/6309/puede-decir-rojo-rojito-pero-no-desde-pdvsa/>, accessed December 15, 2015).

Democracy,” Chávez outlined “five motors” of “constitutive power” for the Bolivarian Revolution to accomplish a transition to socialism—1) Decree Power, 2) Constitutional Reform, 3) Popular Education (Moral and Light), 4) The New Geometry of Power, and 5) The Explosion of Popular Power (Chávez, January 17, 2007).<sup>110</sup> Days after the speech, Chávez asked the unicameral, government-controlled National Assembly to grant him decree power for eighteen months. These special executive powers, immediately granted by the National Assembly, allowed him to issue decrees and laws after a *pro forma* consultation of the presidential cabinet.

Decree 5138 called for a presidential commission to begin drafting a Constitutional reform, the second motor. The Constitutional draft was unveiled in August 2007. Among other things, it proposed a reordering of political-administrative territories that gave the President power to name regional Vice-Presidents whose jurisdiction would span multiple states. Most controversially, it contained a ban on term limits for the Presidency but not for subnational-level elected authorities. Despite Chávez's campaigning, the proposal failed. Voters narrowly defeated the Reform in a December 2, 2007 referendum (51%-49%)—Chávez's first loss in a national vote.

While reform at the top suffered a setback, the government still made progress elaborating a rough outline for the development of state-sponsored partisanship at the base-level. Chávez also used his decree power to create a presidential commission on communal power. This commission, charged with studying proposals to reform the 2006 Law of the Communal Councils, included government ministers, intellectuals, and state frontline workers with backgrounds in activism.<sup>111</sup> Chávez provided direction as to what issues the Commission should prioritize in developing a

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<sup>110</sup> The literal title was popular power, but Chávez in fact used the term interchangeably with communal power throughout the speech. Since I have used popular as a key qualifier for key terms in this project, I use communal power for clarity's sake.

<sup>111</sup> Santiago Arconada, the former director of Hidrocapital's Community Water Affairs management team, participated in the commission (Chávez, January 15, 2007).



reform to the Communal Councils, while situating communal power in the broader context of chavismo's efforts to build socialism.

First, Chávez raised the explosive issue of corruption but in a careful manner. Press reports about low levels of transparency regarding funds administration or outright stealing had elevated the salience of the issue of corruption in discussions about the Councils (Machado, 2009). Although Chávez did not mention the press reports, he noted that “Councils are more than vehicles for financing.... Be on the lookout for the diversion of funds!” (Chávez, *Ibid*, 44). Since Chávez regularly accused the press of plotting against him, it was significant that he even made an implicit admission about the existence of corruption—as a process without authors. His statements did not lead to more financial regulation of the Councils. They simply increased the salience of corruption as one of the key issues surrounding discussions about these groups. Second, Chávez outlined what ‘Communal’ meant in the contexts of his government’s discourse on communal power. He defined ‘community’ as the intersection between the ‘human’ and the ‘territorial’ and went on to explain that each community should have a Communal Council. He drew an explicit connection between the council’s organizational structure and the notion of an “organized community” (Chávez, January 15, 2007). This association had important repercussions since Article 184 in the Constitution used the language of “organized community” to describe the general status of groups with petitioning rights (Article 184, 1999). Thus, if the Councils exclusively represented “organized community,” then other groups lacked the legitimate Constitutional status enjoyed by the Councils.

Beyond adding these meanings to the Communal Councils, Chávez also raised the prospect of scaling them up. He suggested Federations of Councils—e.g., a group of Councils organized on a broader territorial basis and operating in a coordinated fashion in a “Territorial Community”

(Chávez, Ibid. 49). This idea, later elaborated through a plan to develop Communes consisting of multiple Communal Councils, generated concern the groups could become a new layer of governance or a para-statal structure that competes with municipal administration at the base level. These announcements, which were not always implemented so smoothly, had important discursive effects. They created a interpretive framework for assigning organization forms not only top priority but also political status—that is, as chavista branded organizations predicated on a cleavage between government and opposition (Handlin, 2008).

Third, Chávez cited two Venezuelan historical figures, Simón Rodríguez and Simón Bolívar, to describe communal power as akin to a popular mass. Paraphrasing quotations from both figures, Chávez described communal power as “the moral force in a movement of masses... a moral movement, a political movement, an ethical movement, an economic movement to construct socialism, step by step, day by day, toil after toil” (Chávez, Ibid, 51). This description positioned the Councils on the front lines of political contestation, that is, as part and parcel of the government’s political project. To be sure, Chávez affirmed that the “explosion of communal power” represented the “supreme motor” for fulfilling the transitional project of building Bolivarian Socialism (Chávez, January 15, 2007, p. 40).<sup>112</sup>

### *The PSUV: Ordering Participation*

Chávez expended great amounts of energy promoting so-called communal power but he did not believe a ‘popular mass’ constituted a rock solid foundation. Taking a page from Lenin, he used the occasion of the official founding of the PSUV to criticize the framework of governing

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<sup>112</sup> Chávez used the terms communal power and popular power interchangeably in his speech. I prefer the term communal power to maintain a distinction between this governmental proposal and existing processes of popular participation for development and voice.

through support groups organized as a mass. During his “Foundational Address” for the PSUV, which marked the beginning of party building efforts, Chávez painted a clear picture of the difference between mobilization and organization. “There is a difference,” Chávez noted, “between mass and multitude... A mass grows but carries within itself its own end. It may disappear from one moment to the next. Not so with the multitude. A mass organized into multitudes should have orientation, impetus, leadership, and moral force to move it forward” (Hugo Chávez, “About the utmost importance of a party,” March 24, 2007, p. 216). In this respect, what is most significant about Chávez’s party building is that it signaled a new organizational phase marked by goals associated with the broader objective of order.

Organizing was now explicitly partisan in the sense of fashioning a mobilized mass into a social base of a party. Though Chávez made clear the importance of ordering mobilized participants into coherently structured wholes whose collective action patterns are ordered and predictable in relation to partisan goals, his government’s course of action did not immediately prioritize party building. For example, in his speech to mark the founding of the PSUV, when Chávez argued a Socialist party implied the deepening of the revolution, he described the deepening process as first taking place through “the communal councils, self-government, and popular, communal government” (Chávez, *Ibid*, 2007, 204). At the same time, Chávez called on party officials to recruit popular sector-based PSUV militants in two arenas: “universities” and “under the auspices of the Missions (social assistance programs)” which meant “occupying not only physical spaces but also social sectors in which we work or study and within the neighborhoods” (Chávez, 218). If the PSUV’s future in fact hinged on developments in communal power spaces, then it only seemed a matter of time before escalated partisan control over mobilization blurred boundaries between the Councils and the Party.

### *2008 Regional Elections: The PSUV'S Electoral Debut and Opposition Gains*

The PSUV made its electoral debut in the country's November 23, 2008 regional elections for governors and mayors. The PSUV's Campaign Strategy Memo outlined three objectives: "position the PSUV as the new party of the government," stress the "policy achievements of the Chávez government," and wage a "propaganda war against the opposition's counter-revolution" (El Pais, "Chávez, Candidate without a Party Label," October 15, 2008). The party's goal of positioning itself on center stage was telling. The government's electoral strategy entailed leveraging Chávez's popularity to obtain votes for the government and in so doing beginning to layer the party into the state. At virtually all the rallies for PSUV candidates, an image of Chávez on a billboard or on the stage served as the backdrop (Ibid; Personal Observation, CCA, 2008). Although PSUV's candidates earned their place on the party's ticket through internal primaries, the fact they campaigned as "Chávez's candidates" meant voters were much more likely to identify them as chavistas than as PSUVistas.

The election results provided evidence of gains for both the government and the opposition. The PSUV helped chavista candidates campaign under a more coherently articulated set of messages and it gave them the organizational reach to field candidates in all of the country's races. Moreover, the party's primaries had helped sub-national leaders identify the areas where they needed to target precious resources for electoral mobilization and where they could expect solid turnout. The PSUV won seventeen of the twenty governor's races, two hundred and sixty seven out of three hundred and twenty eight municipal governments, and a majority of the total number of votes cast (LAWR—08-47, 2008).

The opposition scored two important symbolic gains in Caracas. First, it won Sucre—an Eastern Caracas municipality with a large population of popular sector voters in the barrios of Petare parish. The victory in Sucre suggested the opposition’s support coalition could be broadened to include urban lower class populations (Lupu, 2010). Second, an opposition candidate won the Metropolitan Mayor of Caracas race even though the electoral authority had banned the initial candidate—Leopoldo López—from running after he was deemed ineligible to hold office, allegedly because of irregularities during his tenure as mayor of Caracas municipality Chacao.

### *The Party-State Nexus: Sponsoring Partisanship 2009*

Chávez recognized the electoral outcomes in the states he lost. “Who can say there is a dictatorship now, and concentration of power in my hands?” he asked (LAWR-08-47, 2008). Nonetheless, his subsequent actions belied that statement.

First, Chávez again raised the contentious issue of term limits. According to the 1999 Constitution, written by a pro-Chávez constituent assembly, Presidents could serve two consecutive six-year terms. This meant that without a new Constitutional reform, Chávez would have to leave power in 2012. Indeed, the defeat of his constitutional reform proposal in 2007 Chávez’s proposed 2007 constitutional reform seemed to rule out his oft-declared intention to govern until 2031 (El Mundo, 11-21, 2011, *Chávez dice que gobernar en Venezuela hasta 2031: nunca nos iremos*” <http://www.elmundo.es/america/2011/11/21/venezuela/1321907976.html>, accessed December 21, 2015). The 2007 draft had proposed to end terms limits for the President but not for subnational elected offices. Facing up to the reality this inconsistency had hurt his proposal’s credibility, Chávez now called for a Constitutional Amendment banning term limits on all offices. The National Assembly approved the proposal and submitted it to the Supreme Court

for a ruling on its Constitutionality. After the Court approved the legitimacy of the amendment—a judgment that required ruling the change would not violate the Constitutional principle of alternation in Executive power—a referendum vote on February 15, 2009 went in Chávez’s favor—55%-45% (LAWR-09-07, 2009). During the short campaign period it was common to see advertisements in the press, sponsored by quasi-governmental organizations such as the *Frente de Misiones Sociales* (Front of Social Missions), claiming that “The Missions” — the government-financed social programs — “support and say yes to the amendment” (January 22, 2009, Ultimas Noticias). Such publicity captured the state’s lead role in cultivating partisan loyalty.<sup>113</sup>

On April 7 Chávez moved to expand the jurisdiction of his administration, a step that helped strengthen the state's role in boosting partisanship. He decreed a special law for “The Organization of the Capital District of Caracas.” The law defined Libertador municipality as the Capital District. This territorial designation was not new. Libertador is the largest municipality in the metropolitan region and it contains a great number of government buildings, including the Executive Office, and had long been known as the country’s capital district (BBC, Chávez names a Chief of Government in Caracas, April 15, 2009; [http://www.bbc.com/mundo/america\\_latina/2009/04/090415\\_0912\\_chavez\\_caracas\\_amab.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/america_latina/2009/04/090415_0912_chavez_caracas_amab.shtml), accessed December 17, 2015). However, the law had three major political-administrative repercussions. First, the Law created a new administrative jurisdiction, the Capital District, under the power of the President, who appointed a ‘Chief of Government for the Capital District.’ Second, the law stripped policing, public works, first responder, and budgeting powers from the

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<sup>113</sup> After the lifting of term limits raised the possibility of unlimited reelection, Chávez adopted a measure that suggested he did not fully accept the consequences of his party’s losses in 2008. In March he reduced the decentralization budget for elected governors and re-centralized authority over airports, highways, and shipping ports (BBC, “Against Centralization,” March 9, 2009). Chávez’s “national security” justification for these measures set an untoward precedent for democratic governance (LAWR-09-11, March 2009).

Metropolitan Mayor—then in the hands of opposition politician Antonio Ledezma.<sup>114</sup> Third, more broadly, the law suggested Chávez’s intent to undercut the power of elected opposition mayors and governors (LAWR, 09-15, April 2009).<sup>115</sup>

### III. Party-State Formation: The Venezuelan Water Sector, The PSUV and MTAs

Chávez appointed Jackeline Faria Chief of the Capital District in April 2009. Faria previously served as President of Movilnet, a government-owned telecommunication company. Initially, she rose through the ranks after serving as President of Hidrocapital (1999-2002), where she helped design the institutional architecture for Community Water Management—the policy that entailed holding Communal Water Council Forums and promoting *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (MTA). From Hidrocapital Faria earned a promotion to Minister of Environment (2003-2006)—the ministry that housed the water utilities.

#### *A Distinctively ‘Chavista’ Water Conference*

One of Faria’s first initiatives as Chief of the Capital District concerned the Caracas water sector. A month after being appointed, Faria organized “*Mesas Tecnicas de Agua: Towards Continuous Water Service in the Capital District*”—a May 16, 2009 conference held at the Chávez-government created *Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela* (The Bolivarian University of Venezuela, UBV) (Personal Observation, May 16, 2009). The event took place on a Saturday morning in the UBV’s “Simon Bolívar” auditorium. There were five institutional co-sponsors, and each institution was represented by an individual speaker. They were as follows: Faria, Cristobal

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<sup>114</sup> The law also redefined the territorial administrative boundaries for the Metropolitan Mayor’s jurisdiction. In converting Libertador into its own capital district, the law narrowed the Metropolitan Mayor’s jurisdiction from five to four municipalities.

<sup>115</sup> In cases where the government did not create an authority whose powers superseded the elected official, it carried out this plan by creating and funding ‘parallel authorities’ that operated in municipalities and states where opposition politicians won office (Carter Center, 2012; Eaton, 2014).

Francisco Ortiz, the President of Hidroven; Alejandro Hitcher, the President of Hidrocapital; Miguel Rodriguez from the Libertador Mayor's Office; and an official from the Ministry of the Communes—the title given to the Ministry of Participation in 2008.

The vast majority of the audience—around two hundred people—consisted of community leaders from poor barrio neighborhoods.<sup>116</sup> Although Faria had framed the event as a conference on improving water service in Libertador, some attendees came from outside Libertador. Hidrocapital invited community leaders from Sucre, Caracas's eastern municipality, in an effort to undermine the opposition's capacity to govern there. Hidrocapital had begun a turf battle with the opposition-controlled *Instituto Municipal de Aguas de Sucre* (IMAS), the Sucre municipal authority charged with distributing water supplied by Hidrocapital. Hidrocapital had tasked two frontline workers with recruiting pro-Chávez community leaders. The objective was to encourage Sucre-based leaders to form MTAs linked to Hidrocapital, providing it a base from which to contest IMAS's activities. Contestation involved, for example, Hidrocapital-coordinated street protests against the Sucre Mayor (Personal Observation, July 10, 2009).

Hidrocapital's decision to invite Sucre-based leaders constituted notable change. When a pro-government mayor was in charge of IMAS administration, Hidrocapital did not invite community leaders from the Sucre jurisdiction to the regional Congress of MTAs held in October 2008. The pro-Chávez IMAS community affairs office—under Mayor Jose Vicente Aválos—promoted MTAs in Sucre, and its director of the unit complained about Hidrocapital's unwillingness to collaborate through initiatives such as the regional Congresses (Personal Observation, December 2, 2008). Plain and simple, Hidrocapital's recruitment of Sucre-based leaders indicated the inclusion of partisan contestation on this state institution's agenda.

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<sup>116</sup> Lower-level officials from Hidrocapital and the other represented institutions filled out the rest of the audience.



The impression that the conference was a distinctively chavista event is strengthened by the fact that a PSUV official was present. An official from the party stationed herself at a modest desk near the entrance of the auditorium—almost as if she were manning a toll booth. She offered to register event participants as militants of the party or to update their contact information for the party’s database. Throughout the conference a steady flow of attendees visited the PSUV-stationed desk. During her public remarks Faria encouraged participants to stop by the PSUV’s mobile office if they had not already (Personal Observation, May 16, 2009).

When I directly asked Faria what the presence of the PSUV official meant for the overall character of the event and for the independence of the MTAs, Faria responded with an indirect answer: “our position in the party has been that community organizations and other collectives are not obligated to be members of the party. There can be militants of the party in the group [MTA or Communal Council] or not; or militants from other parties of the left; these groups are not organizations of the party, and we, the PSUV, are the majority left-wing party in Caracas so it makes sense we have a representative here at the event” (Interview #24). Faria’s rationalization of the PSUV’s presence suggested two key points. One, though party participation was not the conference’s official theme, partisanship was at the center. Two, partisanship held a subtly different meaning than in the past. For example, unlike in previous conferences organized to celebrate the MTAs, where Chávez’s presence or campaigning PSUV politicians symbolized the goals of deepening government support and electoral mobilization, respectively, the presence of a low level PSUV official added a partisan organizational dimension of a highly ordinary nature. There was no election on the horizon—not until September 2010. Registering with the PSUV was about joining the party’s organizational rank-and-file (Personal Observation, May 16, 2009).

In this respect, the discrete nature of the PSUV's presence did not lessen the potent meanings associated with its symbolic background placement. To the contrary, the discrete presence suggested the potent partisan dimensions of the event. The PSUV's presence was about giving the party a competitive advantage. Indeed, its presence raised questions about whether an MTA member could belong to a non-PSUV or non-left wing party. Faria's remarks in our personal interview, and the overall structure of the conference as an event sponsored by a Chávez-appointed agency, implied a change in degree with regards to the institutional forms for practicing favoritism. Whereas before pro-Chávez groups or districts were likely to receive more resources from the state, the emergence of the PSUV in spaces also occupied by state-promoted groups (i.e., the MTAs) opened the possibility for facilitating distribution via the party.

*New Sponsorship, New Times: Water Projects for Communal Councils*

The official purpose of the event was to make announcements about new projects for improving water services in Caracas. In the course of announcing these new investments, Faria offered a brief overview of the MTAs. Her description of the groups highlight their relationship to stateness. The block-level planning efforts of the MTAs helped place the barrio shantytowns on the formal maps of the city so they could be incorporated as populations, not neglected as "green areas" on the planning map (Interview #24). Faria claimed that the policies of Antonio Ledezma, the Metropolitan Mayor of Caracas whose responsibilities she partially usurped as Chief of the Capital District, did nothing to address this problem—that is, his administration exacerbated the problem of neglecting the barrios (Interview #24).

Faria tried to distinguish herself from Ledezma, arguing her administration would not turn its back on the green barrios because chavismo believed these spaces needed to be reincorporated

into city life. She then announced the Capital District government would oversee ten large-scale projects and eight community-level projects to be administered by MTAs. The budget of 32 million *bolivares* for these projects would be sponsored by three institutions—The Capital District of Caracas, the Mayor of Libertador, and the Ministry of Communes. After providing very general outlines of the structural projects, which entailed large-scale public works to improve the physical infrastructure for potable water or sanitation services, Faria told the audience they would be discussing these projects, and their own ideas, in the afternoon meetings to be chaired by engineers. In reality, however, policymakers had predetermined which structural projects would receive funding. The engineer-chaired sessions only served to inform participants about the scope and benefits of projects (Personal Observation, May 16, 2009).

Considerable ambiguity surrounded the community development projects. Faria did not reveal which groups would receive the funding or if particular neighborhoods would receive priority. The afternoon sessions did not provide insight into decision-making regarding case selection either. Furthermore, the funding announcement came at a moment in which the future of the MTAs was in doubt due to the rise of the Communal Councils. Indeed, although Faria stressed the pioneering role of the MTAs, the first *barrio* groups to emerge under Chávez, it was not clear whether the chosen MTAs would have to integrate with a Communal Council to remain eligible. Signs certainly pointed in this direction. The co-sponsorship of the projects by the Ministry of the Communes—the state agency’s whose main job was promoting Communal Councils—suggested that eligibility depended on a MTA group forming or joining a Council. The participants at the conference did not receive clarification on this point. Roughly, the collective attitude could be summarized as follows—either we will receive a follow-up call after the meeting with instructions

about what organizational changes need to be made, or we won't. Participants accepted that authorities controlled collective decision-making.

Two months later, on July 2, 2009, Faria held a follow-up ceremony at her administration's headquarters, previously the city hall offices of the Metropolitan Mayor. This ceremony featured the MTA groups selected to receive project financing. Faria did not explain case selection while awarding eight community projects to MTA – Communal Councils. A detail concerning execution was at the center of the discussion. The contracts signed at the ceremony stated that the “executing agent” of the project funds needed to be a Communal Council (Personal Observation, July 2, 2009; Hidroven “Memorandum of Understanding, July 2, 2009). This stipulation made sense in light of the shifting organizational context and the transition in the source of project funding. The Capital District Government and the *Servicio Autonomo Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales* (The National Funding Agency for the Communal Councils, SAFONAAC), an agency of the Ministry of the Communes, were the main sponsors for the projects. Meanwhile, Hidroven and Hidrocapital, which did not have autonomous budgeting power, were responsible for drawing up the funding agreements, designing the technical elements of the projects, and the monitoring the execution phases. This hierarchy meant that Faria and the Ministry of the Communes would establish the rules to be followed.

Ericka Farías, the government's Minister of the Communes in 2008 and 2009, who experienced a rapid rise to the senior ranks of chavismo after first participating in organized community politics via a Mesa Técnica de Agua in the San Benardino parish of Caracas, measured her words carefully in explaining why the Councils needed to encompass the MTAs or any other groups. The Councils, Ericka Farias argued, are not “organizations per se but, rather, the germs of the new revolutionary institutional framework” (Farias, 2008, 23). In other words, the Councils

did not imply the disappearance of organizational processes such as the MTAs. They implied the integration of processes, with, for example, recognized MTA leaders figuring as prominent candidates for the water committee of the Council. Nonetheless, integration required change.

Four of the groups that received projects came from barrios in the El Valle neighborhood and the other four recipient groups operated in the Brisas de Propatria neighborhood. Both neighborhoods were in the Libertador municipality and a solid majority of populations there tended to vote in favor of the government—e.g., in the 2008 elections PSUV mayoral candidate Jorge Rodriguez won 53.6% of the vote in the parish encompassing Brisas de Propatria and 59.5% of the vote in the parish encompassing these El Valle neighborhoods (CNE.Gov.Ve). Of the eight groups, six had either made significant progress towards registering their Communal Council or had already satisfied these requirements. Two were established MTAs, and before they could receive financing, they needed to undertake the procedural steps to form a Communal Council.

These two MTAs, both of which were from El Valle, mobilized under the auspices of Hidrocapital's Community Water Management policy programs in the early 2000s. Both groups' leaders already had established relationships with a Hidrocapital frontline worker, and, like the origins of MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz, their initial interaction with the utility stemmed from protests about water services. Though this meant the majority of the funded groups had a more top-down background than MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz, it is worth noting that Community Water Council forums served as the magnet for attracting these new participants—the leaders of Councils. In other words, the policy programs remained fairly vibrant spaces in the new context of the government steering collective action toward the Councils.

### *Aligning Theory and Practice: From Communal Utopia to Communal Councils*

Asyadith Pérez was Hidrocapital's specialist when it came to ironing out the details of complex institutional processes. Pérez, the utility's Director of Project Planning from 2000-2010, was responsible for sorting out what procedural steps needed to be taken in order to distribute financing to these groups while they were in a state of organizational status limbo between MTAs and CCs. Fortunately, she had direct experience with this problem, having distributed funds to groups similarly in a state of limbo two years earlier. However, the political context had changed, and the agendas of the sponsors with direct links to President had grown more influential.

It is important to grasp the shifts in funding patterns over this period. In the initial 2005-2006 period Hidrocapital received funds from a subsidiary of PDVSA, and implemented projects based on a cooperation agreement signed with the Ministry of Urban Development. Under this arrangement Hidrocapital independently oversaw two rounds of financing for MTA-managed community development projects. Hidrocapital officials opted to not register the MTAs as civil society organizations, despite the *Ley Organica de Agua Potable y Saneamiento* (Organic Law on Potable Water and Sanitation, LOPSAPS, 2001) stipulating that MTAs are associations constituted in "conformity with the Civil Code" (Article 75, LOPSAPS, 2001).

The loose interpretation of the law, which entailed defining Article 75 as not entailing a binding stipulation that obligates MTAs to register as civil society groups, reflected a normative outlook concerning participation. The key judgment about the law was made by Cristóbal Francisco Ortiz. Before becoming Hidroven President from 2008 to 2010, Ortiz developed a reputation as something of a participation guru, expressing what amounted to a communal utopianism with regards to collective action. In this respect, his arguments captured a chavista

interpretation of the basista philosophical tendency. He believed in a strong state but also argued that situating a group in formal institutional decision-making venues stripped the participation process of its vibrancy. Ortiz also argued that when MTA groups managed project funds registered as civil society groups they adopted an internal hierarchy and, subsequently, there tends to be a “reduction in the levels of social participation because the process, which by nature should be voluntary and plural, becomes formalized” (Ortiz, 2008, 21).

Ortiz probably believed there were principled reasons to not register the MTAs but this alone does not explain the peculiar decision to not register the groups. Hydrocapital likely responded to Chávez's incentives to move as expeditiously as possible and not grow concerned with procedural details. Hydrocapital had grown accustomed to following its practice of not-registering the MTAs and this began to be a problem in 2007 when funding shifted from PDVSA sources to the Ministry of Participation. That year Pérez, the utility's Director of Project Planning, received a memo from the Ministry of Popular Participation that explained funding for the MTAs came with the condition the groups be registered. In short, as of 2007, new funding rules rendered Ortiz's non-registration posture academic. Hydrocapital had no choice but to comply with this requirement.

The new requirements, which took effect gradually throughout 2007, entailed two time consuming processes. First, Hydrocapital had to get its administrative house in order. Officials had to determine whether the MTAs with which they had working relationships had in fact registered as civil society associations on their own. They also had to tabulate the total number of groups, registered and not. This had some positive effects as it helped the utility gain a historical perspective on its achievements in promoting these groups. Yet, since these questions had not been asked in years, trying to answer them involved a frantic process of getting organized (Interview

#43). Second, MTA groups—requirements for which previously consisted of the three steps of filing out a census, sketching a blueprint, and outlining a proposal—had to begin a time consuming process of constituting a civil society association according to the civil registry.

Recounting this experience, Pérez complained about the inefficiencies of the registration process, alleging there were inconsistencies between civil registry protocols in different neighborhoods. She noted it took one MTA close to a full year to receive final approval (Interview #43). She also noted that Hidrocapital felt a bit embarrassed about having to request that MTAs fulfill these administrative procedures. “Imagine! In order for us to assist the people that were elected by their communities as administrative or project team leaders, we had to tell them they had to gain a Tax ID at the SENIAT (Venezuela’s IRS) in order to really become recognized. In other words, we had to manage this huge bureaucratic process!” (Interview #43).

It had occurred to Perez, and Hidrocapital more broadly, that meeting the demands of a bureaucratically organized process of participation required dedicating massive amounts of professional resources to the administration of procedural details. The delayed realization bespoke an interesting paradox about the state’s collective consciousness and conception of its autonomous organizational interests. You might have expected a state institution to value bureaucratic organization. Instead, Hidrocapital, influenced both by Ortiz’s communal utopianism and Chávez’s hyperbolic rhetoric about the moral righteousness of the people, struggled to make bureaucratic management a central institutional concern. The laggardly fashion by which Hidrocapital came to recognize its organizational status as a state institution indicated how chavismo’s populism prioritized institutional presence in society over institutional autonomy. In this respect, stateness under chavismo came to be associated with arenas of highly dense state-society interactions but low levels of bureaucratic organization, contributing to enclaves of



infrastructural capacity to implement policy but not in the most efficient manner, a possibility suggested in Chapter 1's discussion of state capacity as a disaggregated phenomenon.

#### IV. Base-Level Partisanship: Community Development as a Partisan Development

In a Caracas barrio, or in any urban shantytown for that matter, it is common for community leaders to mark the culmination of a community water development project with a celebration. A squatter community is likely to take a special kind of pleasure from improved potable or sanitation services. In Caracas barrios, the completion of a water development project tended to involve either the repair of a poorly functioning local water infrastructure or the installation of the community's first potable water or sanitation service network. Both outcomes constituted appreciable improvements in the quality of living conditions. A MTA's completion of a community water development project was commonly associated with feelings of accomplishment, a sense of promise about the community's capacity, and sheer happiness. For a moment at least, a new optimistic outlook permeated the neighborhood.

Consider, for example, the case of MTA Lomas de Oro. The celebration held to mark the inauguration of a potable water distribution network in the Lomas de Oro neighborhood illustrated the moment in which different uplifting emotions fused together. The event, hosted by MTA Lomas de Oro and paid for out of the budget for the state-financed community water development project, attracted participation from a wide range of neighborhood residents and approximately twenty officials from Hidrocapital (Personal Observation, June 6, 2009). Moreover, Hidrocapital's public relations team sent a camera crew that filmed the celebration ceremony's main activities.

### 1) *Community Development and Institutionalized Voice: MTA Lomos de Oro*

Lomas de Oro—a small neighborhood of 2800 people formed by squatters around 2005—is located on the outskirts of Libertador municipality. The neighborhood is perched high—approximately 2500 meters above sea level—on a mountain chain that separates downtown Caracas from the Vargas state on the littoral coast. The layout of the barrio reveals the skeletal outline of a town. There are rows of shack-style houses, but they are not joined by a boulevard. Moreover, there were no recreation fields, signs of commerce, or paved roads. One dirt road connected Lomos de Oro to the highway between La Yagaura, an industrial zone, and El Junquito.

The celebration ceremony was held in the neighborhood's makeshift 'town center'—a flat, uninhabited dirt area used for recreation. A great big white canopy style tent covered one hundred chairs. The chairs faced an elevated stage with speakers and a microphone. Before the formal proceedings began, a bit of popular culture marked the opening of the celebration. Traditional folkloric dances were performed by two young residents, and, then, in a distinctly Venezuelan tradition of machismo, a female beauty contest was held to select 'Ms. *Mesa Técnica de Agua*, Lomos de Oro' (Personal Observation, June 6, 2009).

The most senior state official present, Hidrocapital President Alejandro Hitcher, was responsible for crowning the pageant winner chosen by the town's judge panel. After completing these duties, he took the microphone from a community member and became the event's emcee and chair. Hitcher praised MTA Lomos de Oro for its hard and efficient work. He then transitioned into his stump speech about 'communal power' and its importance to the government's mission of building socialism. The speech was not particularly hardline in that it focused on how the government's platform could help poor communities instead of emphasizing the importance of the PSUV as the only legitimate expression of chavismo. He concluded quickly. The public seemed

more interested in the day's main event—turning the valve key that opened the potable water spigots in the new water infrastructure. A barbecue with ample amounts of grilled meats, boiled yuca, and ice cold beer continued late into the hot afternoon (Ibid).

### *Contentious Beginnings: Disruptive Mobilization and Getting Organized*

The celebratory mood gave the impression of a happy union between Hidrocapital and MTA Lomas de Oro. But, in a similar manner to the way antagonistic relations between Hidrocapital and El Rosario-Santa Cruz evolved into a solid foundation for collaborative ties, this harmony came together after a contentious start. The relationship began amid a disruptive protest that drew the attention of authorities. Benitez and Franco first made their community's voice heard by organizing a street protest of approximately fifty community residents that obstructed an important transportation route during the morning rush hour. At approximately 6 AM on a weekday they blocked a principal transit artery between La Yaguara and El Junquito. "It was difficult. We were alone [not joined by neighboring communities] when we barricaded the street, and when we did this we did not know what answer we exactly wanted, we simply wanted to be heard, and they said—organize yourself and so we did, we got organized" (Interview #29).

Their human blockade brought traffic to a standstill and caused backups at a critical time. Indeed, the timing of the protest was chosen to create as large a disruption as possible—"as soon as we barricaded the highway we effectively clogged up all of Caracas, it was all very calculated on our part" (Interview #29). The disruption generated a response from the Mayor's Office, which dispatched a team to the site of the protest. The presence of the Mayor's office was a first sign of the protest's impact. But, Benitez and Franco were unsatisfied. They insisted on the need to speak with Hidrocapital. The mayor was "obligated to send someone up [to the point on the highway],"

Franco said, almost bragging as if to suggest this was a necessary but not sufficient response (Interview #29). The demonstrators refused to break up the protest until they received some assurance they could hold a meeting with Hidrocapital's President whom they wanted to directly petition about the barrio's urgent potable water service needs.

The strategy worked. Benitez and Franco received an the on spot phone call from Hidrocapital President Hitcher. A meeting was arranged and Benitez and Franco formed a relationship with Victor Diaz, the frontline worker for the surrounding El Junquito parish. Through Victor they submitted a project proposal after completing the three step process—census, blueprint, and diagnostic—for forming a MTA. Funding became available but the sponsor, government institution SAFONAAC, required the “executing organization” to be a Communal Council or to have tax identification (Comptroller General of the Republic, December 19, 2007).

Asyadith Perez—Hidrocapital's Director of Planning, 2000-2010—provided guidance for MTA Lomas de Oro as they went about learning how to register their group as a civil society association, a step that would grant them a tax identification number. Registering the Civil Society Association MTA Lomos de Oro took approximately six months, finalized on February 18, 2008. The civil registry for Libertador, a branch of the national civil registry under the Ministry of Interior and Justice, recognized the “constitutive act” of the Civil Society Association MTA Lomos de Oro undertaken by thirty eight community residents at a neighborhood assembly overseen by a magistrate (Constitutive Act of Civil Society Association MTA Lomos de Oro, February 18, 2009). The MTA would exist as a civil society association, according to the court document, for twenty years or until a citizen's assembly decided something different. Its tax identification, on the other hand, was only valid for three years. Theoretically, the group would have to renew its credentials within a relatively short time (Ibid).

A little over a month later, Hidrocapital and MTA Lomas de Oro signed a memorandum of understanding with a budget and outline of the project's scope (March 29, 2008). The project called for installing an entire new distribution network to benefit all 2800 inhabitants with direct household connections. The budget was 650,000 *bolivares*—approximately \$30,000 (Hidrocapital, March 29, 2008, Budget, pp. 1-3). It also called for the installation of a basic sanitation network to try and channel sewage out of the community to the main line that ran along the adjoining highway. A contractor installed the project. Their work was supported by a small community labor team and Benitez and Franco headed an oversight committee that tracked construction's progress and helped with community relations (Interview #29).

During the project's implementation, Franco and Benitez broadened their network of contacts to include state officials beyond Hidrocapital. They had received invitations to state-sponsored trainings for forming a Communal Council, workshops that served as opportunities for establishing contacts with state officials as much as learning the official rules for constituting a Council (Interview #29). After Franco and Benitez organized a Council—they served as the two directors of the powerful financing committee that oversaw the organization's bank account—they began petitioning the state for an infrastructure budget that would allow them to pave the main community road and install street lighting. Faria's Capital District Government invited them to participate in an "Infrastructure Cabinet" meeting, hosted by an official that had a dual affiliation with the Faria Capital District administration and the elected Mayoral administration of Libertador. That official also extended them a new invitation to the *Sala Batalla Social* (The Assembly for 'Ideological Struggle')—a government promoted arena for debating new policy proposals, such as the Communes, in 2009 (Interview #29).

Though their leadership of, first, a MTA, second, a Communal Council, and, third, in government-sponsored forums coincided with the government's overall radicalization, Benitez and Franco did not instantaneously become ideological supporters of chavismo. They presented themselves as “utilitarian” supporters of the government—a term pollsters used to describe non-ideological supporters (Gil Yepes, 2011). Utilitarian helps capture the fact that Benitez and Franco attended meetings to obtain community development benefits. Thus, the utilitarian designation does not mean they were disingenuous participants or fraudulent chavistas. It instead implies the pragmatic nature of their judgments.

The more interesting question about their participation concerns effects, not intentions. What consequences did community development have? Though MTA Lomos de Oro was an active working segment of project installation, the scope of community contributions in designing and installing the project was much narrower than in El Rosario-Santa Cruz. For example, only Benitez and Franco earned a wage from the project, whereas a four person leadership committee and a twenty-person work crew received weekly compensation as part of MTA El Rosario-Santa Cruz's engagement in community development. Moreover, the creation of MTA Lomos de Oro was more a top-down solution to the threat of disruptive protest than the outgrowth of facilitative leadership that took place in a policy context of institutional mobilization. In this respect, the community development that MTA Lomos de Oro helped spur was for the barrio neighborhood but project administration was not really ‘of’ a public nature or ‘by’ the locals.

On the other hand, MTA helped cultivate a degree of horizontal voice in the community through their pursuit of development. At least it provided a meaningful place from which to speak. Making a judgment about the overall strength of horizontal voice requires situating voice's character in its context and defining its directionality. For example, the cultivation of a Lomos de

Oro social identity was crucial to mobilizing protest and organizing a MTA, as well as central to development efforts. But, was it crucial to anything more? With policy processes clearly prioritizing development gains over expressions of contentious voice, the procedural gain of registering the MTA as a civil society association seemed subordinate. Understandably, given that their priorities lay with obtaining potable water service at virtually any cost, the cumbersome process of arranging participants into a formal organization did not cognitively register—to Benitez and Franco, for example—as an expression of vertical voice against, and thereby within, the political system. In other words, though they had acquired the opportunity to create a civil society organization and amplified their voices by following procedural instructions to register a MTA, the policy context devalued the creation of a civil society association— arguably an intensely political process that, first, entails exercising rights to petition and, second, involves scaling up the possibilities for voice through a collective process of articulating demands.

It spoke volumes that Benitez and Franco expressed great pride about being organized but minimized critical elements of the process of becoming organized. They did not perceive their newfound status as a civil society group to be a political achievement, let alone as a contribution to a civil society's emergence. Instead, their contentment stemmed from being organized in a vehicle the government deemed a legitimate platform for issuing petitions. Thus, the case of MTA Lomos de Oro contained a range of outcomes, many of them positive, but none of them indicative of strong vertical voice. The policy context shaped social expectations about collective action and their own interests in community development created incentives to maintain a relationship of institutionalized voice with government officials.

In this regard, the case of MTA Lomos de Oro does not demonstrate the failures of collective action or the impoverished state of barrio organizing. It demonstrates how the policy

context produced opportunities for contention and for highly uplifting moments in community leaders' struggle to achieve better living conditions as well as a series of instruments for shaping collective action into a more orderly exercise of state-regulated community development. Once again, though, the state conditioned collective action through regulation of the local context's political dimensions, not how groups managed financial administration. As suggested by the wide span of activities that culminated in a situation of institutionalized voice between MTA Lomos de Oro and the state (Hirschman, 1981), it was possible that some experiences with Communal Councils could entail unpredictably contentious state-society relations while others could entail highly predictable, politically harmonious interactions.

## *2) Compacting Organization Spaces: The Communal over the Popular*

Channeling mobilization through the organizational vehicle of the Communal Councils created varying levels of friction for different groups. For example, historical urban social movements with express pro-Chávez sympathies viewed the emergence of the Councils skeptically (Fernandes, 2010). Broadly speaking, such movements, which tended to cluster in urban popular sector neighborhoods, disagreed with a model of collective action that implied participating in governmentally-regulated spaces. Their quasi-anarchist tendencies disposed them to evaluate the Councils as akin to governmental occupation of barrio spaces (Fernandes, Ibid).

However, the Councils did not pose a threat to movements' capacity to mobilize support. Neither did they undercut their chances for receiving government support through block grants that movement leaders largely spent as they saw fit (Velasco, 2015). Moreover, because the Councils are territorially based organizations, a leader or token participant of a self-defined 'autonomous' social movement, for example, may also be an active participant in a local Council



at no direct cost to the movement group (Fernandes, 2010, 248-249). The encompassing nature of social movements organizational base, not to mention their cultivated political status as bastions of pro-Chávez support, reduced the challenges posed by adaptation.

### *Rise and Fall: Communal Councils and Popular Associations*

By contrast, the rise of the CC as the centerpiece of government organizational efforts was of greater consequence to self-help grassroots groups. These antecedent groups depended on the state for funds but did not enjoy organizational legitimacy as accepted pro-government groups with special political status within chavismo. For example, the near collapse of both *El Consorcio of Catuche* (The Catuche Consortium) and the ‘Ojo de Agua’ *Consorcio for the Proyecto Integral de Desarrollo Endogeno* (Consortium for the Integral Project for Endogenous Development, ‘PIDE-Ojo de Agua’) serves as testament to how government-promoted organization via the Council created winners and losers. Both groups received seed funding from the Housing Agency within the Ministry of Urban Development and Infrastructure to pursue neighborhood development after natural disasters—floods in both cases—left community infrastructure in tatters. Working with state officials, the groups registered as civil society associations, which granted them legal status for each to open a bank account (Barreto, 2009).

Leaders of both these associations expressed support for a robust state role in promoting popular participation but they disapproved of the Councils initiative. First, the Councils raised questions about whether groups organized on a neighborhood-wide basis could survive. The Councils presupposed populations of between two hundred and four hundred families, which created the strong possibility of groups organized along a handful of blocks rather than a neighborhood of a thousand households. Second, these associations had coalesced as a result of

community initiative; their leaders felt this bottom-up history guided their collective action in an independent direction (Interview #20). Association leaders did not perceive the Councils as akin to examples of occupation. They diagnosed them, and the MTAs, as state-sponsored forms of societal mobilization that had strong chavista overtones (Interview #60).

This diagnosis had a basis in fact. The dilemma ultimately concerned political objectives. The associations' disapproval of the Councils damaged their chances of establishing solid working relationships with state officials, which, in the case of Hidrocapital, they had maintained until 2007. State officials tasked with promoting the Councils maneuvered around the associations and sponsored the mobilization of Councils in the same territory where associations existed. This eventually resulted in a kind of low-intensity competition between neighborhood-level organizations with the state taking the side of the Councils. Partiality to the Councils was cast into relief by the widely divergent degrees of pressure state officials placed on association and Council leaders regarding financial matters. For example, in what was described as an unprecedented move, state officials pressured Valero, of PIDE Ojo de Agua, to open up the organization's financial records and provide detailed accounting of spending from the 'logistics and administration' budget—the pot of money reserved for leaders' expenses incurred while traveling to meetings or carrying out other associational business. This pressure eventually grew into a deep probe into organizational finances and resulted in the government freezing the bank account of PIDE. Though PIDE leaders retained the services of a public defender to defend their position, the lawyer was essentially powerless. When the public defender could not provide a path forward for the organization to regain access to its bank account—managed at a state-owned bank—or to have a fair hearing regarding its bookkeeping, PIDE fell apart. The organization's leaders no longer

believed their participation was worthwhile. As they scaled back their involvement the group disbanded (Interview #60).

### *Councils and Corruption: Pervasive Problems, Selective Regulation*

There were reasons to question the transparency of all barrio community development organizations, but the Councils in particular drew skepticism. Public opinion surveys of residents in neighborhoods where Councils existed reported significant concerns about the overall probity with which Communal Council leaders administered the groups (Centro Gumilla, 2008, 2009; Datos, 2011). Moreover, press accounts, compiled in part based on the Comptroller General's investigation into broader patterns in financial transparency, reported the existence of 1,500 cases of corruption under investigation (El Universal, May 7, 2011; [aporrea.org](http://aporrea.org), April 27, 2011). With these reports circulating, the problem became an accepted flaw. Government spokesperson grudgingly made public references to these weaknesses.

Modesto Ruiz, a federal deputy who represented the state of Miranda in the country's unicameral National Assembly, went a step beyond admitting reports of corruption had an empirical basis. He in fact offered an institutional explanation, if not a full apology, for corruption. Ruiz pointed to the legal structure surrounding the Councils. "There was not," said Ruiz, "penal or civil responsibility for CC members or spokespersons in the 2006 Communal Council Law. This could have produced a context for some actions of sinful nature, of embezzlement, of misadministration of Communal Council resources" (Interview #62). Indeed, the Communal Council Law, passed in 2006, did not make a definitive determination as to whether Council leaders held a different legal status than an NGO leader, who could be held liable for embezzlement. Confusion surrounded the issue of whether Council leaders could be defined as

quasi-public officials or if they were legally liable for their actions only by virtue of their administration of public funds (Bastidas, 2007).

The Councils did seem to be breaking new ground as an institutional layer of government while the legal territory was uncharted. As a result, Council activities lacked clear boundaries. Ruiz's observations make reference to an evolving legal context but he did not clarify what statutory changes had real impact on Council behavior. It seems more likely he was referring to changes in the country's broad "Corruption Law," a piece of legislation that underwent regular revisions in light of new policies, such as the Councils. For example, the 2009 National Assembly-passed reform to the Communal Councils made cosmetic changes. The reform changed the title of the financing organ of the Council from the 'Communal Bank' to the 'Financing Unit' and it altered the legal structure of this entity. Previously, Council leaders had registered the Communal Bank as an economic cooperative, a status that allowed the bank's accounts to earn interest and, therefore, according to government spokespersons, situated the Council's financial activities in a commercial capitalist context (Interview #38). Councils' Financing Unit operated in an exclusive, bilateral relationship with state institutions putatively established to regulate their affairs (Interview #38).

These changes suggested growing concern about corruption but nothing more. For example, in 2009 government liaisons to Councils began a communications strategy of informing Council leaders the state would prosecute case of corruption within Council (Interview #38). But the idea was to only present the threat of prosecution. Officials at SAFONAAC offered no evidence of CC leaders being publicly prosecuted for embezzlement. The examples that surfaced in the press left a trail of evidence regarding the nature of irregularities but the accounts did not indicate if sanctions were imposed. In effect, the basic premise that the Councils were too important to fail—

as described in Ch. 4—remained valid. Consequently, when it came to government oversight of the Councils, non-regulation constituted the norm. Exceptions to the rule existed but these raised suspicions of political meddling. When regulatory obstacles to Council activities appeared, these seemed to reveal a politically-motivated agenda of maintaining an un-level playing field for Council leaders known to have anti-Chávez sympathies (El Nacional, January 22, 2012; Personal communication, González Margot, Vice-President, *Consejo Local de Planificación Pública*, Baruta).

To comprehend the stakes of complying with government-established participation norms, it is useful to illustrate what the benefits of non-regulation entailed for groups accorded legitimate status. Two examples help capture possibilities for community leaders that complied with the organizational mandate of forming Councils but maintained a degree of freedom to manage affairs with relative independence. The examples capture different salient behavioral trends within the overall pattern of non-regulation—opportunism and moral turpitude.

The first example captures how Council leaders could take advantage of the Councils ability to solicit funds from more than one institution at once. Ultimately, leaders could take advantage of the fact that there was little if any coordination among state institutions. Anderson, the leader of Community Council Romulo Gallegos with over a decade of experience in community activism, had exploited this situation. When I visited the community worksite, CC Romulo Gallegos was in the process of installing a new water main that would improve the quality of potable water service distribution at the household level. The service cycle in the barrio tended to fluctuate between fifteen and thirty days and so the new pipeline would make a difference at the level of the quality of distribution—not in terms of its frequency. While I was observing the

construction project—an operation that at its peak employed twenty-five individuals in different roles—an illuminating encounter between the CC and the state unfolded (Interview #41).

“The people from SAFONAAC (the regulatory agency of the Venezuelan Ministry for the Communes) are coming up to visit the community today,” said Anderson, as he glanced at his cell phone to read a text message. “Why?” I asked. “They [the state] involuntarily gave our Community Council two different sums of money for the same project—laying a pipeline that will connect us to the city water system,” he explained. Prying, I asked, “Will this be a problem?” Undisturbed, he continued, “No. We as a community have other needs; we want to build a police module, which in fact was the first priority, according to the assembly of citizens. As long as we administer and execute the project with our own hands in a way that benefits the community, everything will be fine. They will understand.” (Interview #41)

Anderson’s confidence was rewarded when he met with SAFONAAC representatives that afternoon. As if to signal the purely symbolic nature of these efforts, the SAFONAAC officials came dressed in vests adorned with the slogan—*el pueblo rinda cuentas al pueblo* (the people hold the people accountable). Not even a warning followed. Anderson received permission to move ahead and build a police module.<sup>117</sup>

The basic state objective of providing resources for community development worked to Anderson’s benefit. The CC had received funds from two institutions but institutional objectives converged. In other words, though CC Romulo Gallegos received one sum of money from a budget associated with the ‘April 13’ Social Mission, a social assistance plan to promote urban development in barrios with residents living in situations of extreme poverty, and another from the Ministry of Communes, which had the organizational goal of furthering the Councils, these institutions had the same basic goal—to ensure project funds were spent on development projects.

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<sup>117</sup> My subsequent inquiries did not discover any evidence of Anderson or the Council being punished.

They justified letting Anderson and his colleagues determine how to allocate the resources so long as evidence of development could be produced.

But more than government mismanagement was involved. Anderson and his co-leaders showed some awareness of how their participation in a Communal Council amounted to a form of compliance that had resulted in their ability to wield control over their affairs. Anderson noted that the *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* are theoretically required to show their financial statements to Hidrocapital on a regular basis but that “in practice, they do not usually do this” (Interview #41). He interpreted such non-regulation as resulting in community leaders’ “authority to make decisions, at least with regards to how we are going to distribute resources within the community” (Interview #41). This local control over decision-making emboldened Anderson to feel as though he exercised some degree of organizational independence. “This is good for us, the fact we can make these spending decisions, because it means we manage affairs as if a local government existed, which is practically true” (Interview #41).

In comparison to this example of inefficient resource allocation, CC Las Clavellinas demonstrates a much less positive outcome of the state's non-regulation of development funds administration. CC Las Clavellinas, located in the hillside barrios of the Carapita neighborhood, had gained notoriety in Antimano Parish as the state’s most favored group. During my field visit, the leader of the Council scooped me up at the Antimano metro station in a brand new Toyota Four-Runner Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV)—a highly desired luxury sports utility vehicle in the country. The Toyota SUV belonged to the Council, Marquina told me, and it was loaned out, she said, on election day to help mobilize voters to polling places (Interview #35).

The building in which I interviewed Marquina contained a children’s day care, a community health clinic, and an administrative office staffed by a notary public who issued letters

of residence. The Council's leadership managed all these operations. Before constructing this healthcare building the Council had completed four infrastructure projects in the neighborhood—potable water and sanitation, paving of the roadways, repairing of the stairwells that served as neighborhood footpaths, and housing construction for dilapidated shacks known as ‘ranchos.’ Four new projects were reportedly in the pipeline. The leaders of this Council boasted of their connections to government officials and touted the importance of these relationships for obtaining development funds and quickly making progress from one project to the next. A second interviewee seemed embarrassed by the Council’s project riches, noting she was surprised the Council received funding from the April 13 Mission amid “all the needs in surrounding neighborhoods” (Interview #36).

Very simply, the rapid growth of the Council changed the organization. “Initially, we undertook this as volunteer work. But, as it became necessary to strengthen the organization, and as the work became public, things changed, we all had free time but we were also taking on major responsibilities to complete the project—just us, by ourselves” (Marquina, Ibid). In other words, as these Council leaders began to interpret their work as equivalent to public service, they also began to justify receiving compensation. Though Marquina did not specify when this transition took place, it is likely the change took place as they moved from promoting the Council’s formation to administering it. Moreover, once the leaders developed commitments to the policy program of participating in the Council, they began to perceive electoral and policy matters as essentially coterminous. Showing support for the policy meant for all practical purposes expressing support for the government. For example, said one leader: “we help the President, who has given us ‘this co-responsibility;’ this political path we are on thanks to Chávez” (Interview #35). Such expressions of thanks had exclusionary side-effects. “This is a revolutionary process,” said



Marquina, “and as result, we cannot say the opposition participates 100% here; we do not exclude but at the same time it is not possible to provide 100%.... The idea is to teach people what this process of change, which we are working for, provides. If we do not carry out this function, then when election time comes we will be doomed” (Interview #35). Approximately 80% of the residents that benefitted from CC Las Clavellinas provided chavismo with votes but this was the norm in Antimano parish where chavismo was the dominant force. Although this case may defy simple explanation as vote buying, it does seem to confirm the fact that government efforts to reward supporters combined with a plan to fund the most organized. This combination not only produced development results but also narrowed the effects.

### *3) CC Brisas de Propatria: The Party's Presence in Community Development*

Jacqueline Faria’s Capital District Government distributed four community water developments projects to Communal Councils in the Brisas de Propatria neighborhood.<sup>118</sup> Brisas de Propatria— which loosely translates as ‘Breezy Propatria’—is an historic neighborhood of hillside barrios that overlook Caracas from the west. Commuting to Brisas from the local Hidrocapital office near the metro station in Propatria was often difficult. The trip, which took about thirty minutes, depending on the road’s conditions, practically required having a four-by-four vehicle. Steep hills made it very difficult for sedan model vehicles to make the trip. Still, despite its marginal position, Brisas de Propatria was fairly well integrated into state plans. Officials from Hidrocapital had longstanding relations to the leaders of these Councils. Cesar González, the frontline worker for the zone, chaired a Communal Water Council (CCA) held in

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<sup>118</sup> The administration distributed the other four water development projects to Councils in the El Valle parish. I made field visits to two of these four projects and attended ten Hidrocapital CCA assemblies in El Valle.

the neighborhood's two schoolhouses every two weeks. The CCA dated to 2004, and I attended ten of its assemblies over the course of 2008 and 2009.

Soon after Faria's appointment in April 2009, the venue of the CCA began to experience some important changes. A partisan initiative launched by Jorge Rodriguez, the Libertador Mayor, which he cynically named the Parish Government to try and capture the spirit of de-centered government associated with LCR's 'Governing from the Parish' process, began to coordinate its efforts with the Faria government. Rodriguez's Parish Government entailed paid PSUV brokers occupying barrio spaces that state frontline workers first established.

In Brisas de Propatria Maritza served as the local broker who attempted to position herself between Hidrocapital and the four Communal Councils selected to receive development funds to carry out a water project. I observed Maritza as she participated in the Brisas CCA forum on two occasions. She was new to the forum, and identified herself by her residency, a neighbor in a Brisas barrio, and by her employment, "from the Parish government of Jorge Rodriguez"—the mayor of Libertador (Personal Observation, October 14, 2009, my emphasis). Initially, Maritza participated as an observer, and spoke up during the forum's open discussion period to describe the Parish government's goals. Maritza explained that the Parish government sought to integrate all community spaces, as the Mayor sought to gain a complete understanding of activities taking place at the parish and block levels. Emphasizing the potentially positive element of these remarks, Cesar welcomed any kind of coordination with the Mayor's office.

On the second occasion Cesar began the forum by introducing the leaders of the Councils slated to receive development funds for the projects sponsored by Faria's Capital District Government. Hidrocapital played an intermediating role between the Faria government and the Councils, and was responsible for overseeing the community affairs dimensions of project

implementation. Leaders from all four Councils stood up to be recognized and made very brief remarks to introduce themselves and express their enthusiasm about the opportunity to improve the potable water service in their neighborhoods. Maritza took the floor during a open discussion period that followed. She first issued what amounted to an indirect warning. “Resources from the revolution,” she said, “should stay in the hands of the revolution” (Personal Observation, October 28, 2009). She then turned towards Guillermo, the leader of CC Olivet II, pointed her finger directly at him, and denounced him—and, by association, his wife and father-in-law, who accompanied him at the meeting—as a counter-revolutionary. “These people,” she said, “do not belong to the PSUV and they do not deserve the revolution’s resources” (Ibid). With this dramatic remark Maritza brought her short speech to a close and sat down. An uncomfortable silence fell over the room. Cesar waited a moment and cautiously spoke about the importance of respecting everyone’s right to speak, including those who had strong opinions. He did not directly address the remarks or the accusation, and simply moved on to the next agenda item—small repairs scheduled for the upcoming two weeks. The meeting ended shortly thereafter, the tension in the room still thick (Ibid).

During a private interview, Guillermo and his wife, along with other CC Olivet members, expressed concern about both Maritza’s temperament and the content of her remarks. But, they did not report being subjected to harassment as they went about implementing a potable water project in their neighborhood. They told me that Cesar assured them the project would not be affected by Maritza’s interventions. Though his assurances helped them feel more comfortable, they had already imagined the possibility that organizing would become subject to partisan pressures. In other words, they were not particularly surprised by the way in which the PSUV had inserted itself into their community’s affairs through a local broker. Guillermo worked at the state-

owned telecommunications company the CANTV. He was not a PSUV party member, but acknowledged succumbing to pressures to participate in pro-government marches. Moreover, Guillermo insisted his participation in pro-government marches was genuine. Such expressions of loyalty, he and his wife agreed, were not the same as direct participation in the PSUV affairs. The party's presence in the neighborhood seemed to imply control over daily community life, while pressure on him as a state employee to support the government seemed related to a combination of career and political interests (Interview #59).

Cesar, who himself was a radical chavista and a member of the PSUV, considered it appropriate for the state to provide resources to CC Olivet II. Through his support, Hidrocapital provided a kind of buffer between the Councils and PSUV officials. At the same time, this protection seemed to be pretty thin. Guillermo admitted it was in the best interest of the CC to eventually develop a relationship with Maritza, as PSUV brokers seemed to be growing more and more present in the neighborhood (Interview #59). In other words, even though Maritza did not have the power to undermine CC Olivet II's water project at the moment, it seemed highly possible she or someone else from the PSUV could gain such power. The chances for non-PSUV members—including chavistas uninterested in the party—to receive funding seemed to be on the decline.

### *Community Development as Partisan Development*

What did Guillermo's worries and thinking about the Council's strategic steps suggest about future developments in Brisas de Propatria and similar places? They suggest something more subtle than the emergence of a party. They seemed to suggest a potential implication of party-building's effects on organizing efforts from above. The scene seemed to be set for community development to veer away from popular development and toward partisan development. Rather

than opportunities for development of and by the people, which, to be sure, created fertile conditions for persuading residents to vote chavista, the emerging context seemed to be marked by controlled spaces for party sponsored and party controlled community development. In this regard, community development came to not only capture a spirit of partisanship for the revolution but also important opportunities to recruit PSUV supporters through coercion. Mobilization, once a multidimensional process exhibiting institutional and politicized tendencies, trended toward becoming a partisan affair managed by the PSUV.

## Conclusions

In a way, this chapter charted the processes and events through which chavismo become a more traditional political phenomenon. What I mean is that the transformation of chavismo from a case of populism into a nascent party state placed the political movement on a path to become a political party in which leaders and rank-and-file members affirm party forms of organization over others. What could be termed the normalization of chavismo was not particularly surprising, especially in light of literature on the essential roles political parties play in democratic and non-democratic political systems.

Building a party was a rational move that, it should also be added, fit with the country's historical pattern of partisan organizations steering a transition from mobilization to ordering organization through a party (Levine, 1973). Moreover, it evoked similar processes of change in organizational form seen in Mexico after the populism of Cardenas gave way to one of the strongest party-states ever created—what nobel prize winning novelist Mario Vargas Llosa termed the seventy-year “perfect dictatorship” of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI).

Naturally, chavismo's transformation raises questions about the status of populism as a political phenomenon. That is, if populism gives way to party building, then what is the advantage

of designating a particular political movement as passing through a phase of populism rather than terming it charismatic leader-led party (Panebiacno, 1988) or a “personalist political party” (Kostadinova and Levitt, 2014, 500)? This is a very important question. My approach to populism as a process—which borrows from Roberts’s point, that in paradigmatic cases of populism both mobilization and organization are present but to varying levels of intensity (Roberts, 2006)—has sought to situate chavismo’s political movement within discussions of organization. The last thing a study of populism should do is avoid discussion of the example’s relationship to other organizational phenomenon. Avoiding that discussion perpetuates the negative agenda on populism in which the primary subjects of analysis are the examples of the ways in which the movement exhibits important stylistic differences in mobilization and organization.

This project has sought to make a contribution by unpacking these stylistic differences in terms of ground level practices and aggregating insights from such base level processes to expand the frame of analysis about what constitutes organizing. Indeed, this is why students of populism are likely to encounter interesting puzzles of institutionalization rather than data about the strength of the movement as an institution. In other words, students of populism should welcome the comparison with political parties to sharpen the distinctions between the two without neglecting the pull exerted by the organizational imperative—any movement needs to exhibit coherence in order to operate with some level of competence.

What is the advantage of describing chavismo as a case of populism through a process approach to the concept? This allows us to sharpen understanding of the populist concept as a chameleon-like phenomenon that evolves in light of the conditions and thereby makes possible different forms of organizing politics between state and society. To be sure, the leaders of a populist political movement play important roles in molding these conditions, especially after they

have consolidated power. But, the point of contingency between mobilizing a mass movement from the state and being able to shape this mass into something is arguably what differentiates populism from a personalist party—as comparisons between Venezuela’s chavismo (1999-2013) and Peru’s Fujimori (1990-2000) have often highlight (Roberts, 2006).

The period in which chavismo undertook such mass mobilization from the state, a process, which as Chapters 4 and 5 argued, also entailed elements of organization, was hardly free of politics as usual. The example of Communal Council las Clavellinas discussed in this chapter shows that clientelistic distribution played a prominent role in processes of community development. The more interesting forms of mobilization and organization, I have argued, illustrated a distinction between standard community development and what may be called popular development. The popular qualifier is not meant to suggest these examples were examples of autonomous grassroots development in which self-built organizations accomplished development on their own. To the contrary, the state made it possible for development to be popular by implementing policy programs that created conditions in which projects could be implemented in the light of the local community public and by people who had initiative and interpersonal leadership skills to draw together a working segment of the community interested in improving the local landscape. The fact that financial incentives played a role is of course relevant. But the existence of opportunities for social assistance does not negate the possibility that mobilization could disclose opportunities for horizontal voice within a barrio that otherwise faced great challenges to overcoming a mutual sense of distrust, a hurdle to getting collective action going anywhere (Hirschmann, 1984).

The evidence I marshaled about the existence of processes of popular development may invite reflection about how to continue developing theory about populism. This would be a highly

positive contribution. The concept tends to generate fear and ideological interpretation rather than careful, measured analysis of the concept's substantive dimensions. For theory development, the main analytic strategy suggested here is to situate cases of populist movements in power in the grey zone of institutionalization between anti-system reformism and defense of the system's status quo. This can be done by centering the process of intermediation, a move that in the context of Venezuela's chavismo helped the account capture the richness of political contestation under a semi-authoritarian regime that governed in an historically democratic political context.

This project thus issues a call to scale analysis up to the overarching level of state-society relations while paying careful attention to the specific patterns that dominant processes of state-society relations over time and space. Such a strategy provides insights about both what is distinctive about populism and about the patterns through which it breaks down into something more like a machine-type political party. Most importantly, it allows us to capture this developmental sequence and in so doing illustrate how the overlapping of different organizational practices can result in an ensemble of political formations that evoke the complex, contradictory meanings of populism.



## Appendix A: Methodological Narrative

I first learned about the existence of *Las Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Technical Water Committees, MTA) during preliminary field research undertaken from July to August in 2007. Conversations with Venezuelan academics interested in the mobilization of collective action in the barrios, introductory interviews with shantytown residents who had some familiarity with— or had participated in—a MTA-related process, and a review of the initial research on the MTAs served as initial sources of information. A synthesis of insights from these insights amounted to a conception of the MTAs as community-based social movement groups struggling for social citizenship. This conception was rooted in the literature (Arconada, 1996, 2005; Antillano, 2005; Cariola et al., 2007; Fernandes, 2010; Contreras, 2004, 2013). However, it proved to be a romantic conception of what factors contributed to these groups' collective action, and to mobilization in the Chávez era (1999-2013) more broadly.

The key analytic insight behind this idealistic portrayal of the MTAs concerned their status as an independent, self-stimulated phenomenon. MTAs appeared to be part of a grassroots civil society. They were free standing groups that could be differentiated from the state, even though policy processes underpinned their emergence at the interstices of state and society. After preliminary field work I had some doubts about this diagnosis, which contained some unresolved tensions—i.e., did groups that formed at the interstices of state and society really become completely differentiated from institutions? But, as I was just beginning, I deferred to the literature. Only during intensive field research, undertaken from September 2008 to December 2009, did it become possible to disentangle the puzzle.

### *Read, Revise and Reframe*

During the first four months of an extended period of fieldwork (August 2008-December 2009) I read widely, revised my assumptions in light of trends on the ground, and eventually reframed my framework. In the earliest part of this phase, while I was still working on establishing a line of communication with officials at Hidrocapital, the revision process took place through the standard process of reading new and emerging research. First, researchers' accounts on similar processes called into question whether a differentiation between state and society could be established so easily. Kirk Hawkins's account of the Bolivarian Circles' dependency on the state suggested that, at the least, I would need to become familiar with the institutional context surrounding community-based groups (Hawkins and Hansen, 2006). At the same time, research on the highly politicized discourse of civil society made it difficult to identify what groups belonged in civil society (Lander, 1995; Encarnación, 2003; Arenas and Gómez-Calcano, 2005; Fernandes, 2010). Fernandes's political ethnography of historical social movements that attempted to protect their cultural and community development activities from state penetration suggested that while vibrant bottom-up processes had been neglected in the study of Venezuelan politics, these groups did not consider themselves autonomous in the liberal sense of freedom from the state (Fernandes, 2010). In short, though some writing on the MTAs highlight the fact they were a pre-Chávez phenomenon, research about base arena trends during the Chávez era hammered home the need to more fully consider political and institutional contexts: a charismatic leader-headed, self-proclaimed revolutionary government that explicitly attempted to redefine the state framework, first by creating a new institutional structure through a Constitution in 1999, and by calling for state institutions to establish new relationships with popular sector segments of society through a

radicalization of the government's reformist program into a model of 'Twenty First Century Bolivarian Socialism.'

Second, in the early phases of field research, I faced a dilemma concerning data scarcity. Naively, I expected there would exist the skeletal outline of a data set at Hidrocapital. The data I had envisioned as existing was a census or registry of existing MTA organizations, ideally with some information about their organizational histories. The plan was to use this data to develop a roughly representative sample of MTAs and select cases based on their organizational histories—a proxy for endowment of social capital—and the intensity of local water problems in the neighborhood—a grievance variable for capturing insights about the motivation for collective action. Instead, officials at Hidrocapital told me no such census of Caracas-based MTAs existed. Moreover, they did not have a relief map that indicated where water problems varied at the sub-parish level.

With progress on obtaining a data set stalled, I faced an important choice about how to take advantage of my time on the ground. The answer was right in front of me. In the course of building relationships with officials at Hidrocapital, I learned something crucial about what the MTAs symbolized as a political-institutional process. There was a social network history that underpinned the MTAs and the policy that guided efforts by Hidrocapital officials to build what officials there called Community Water Management. This network's history needed to be told, I decided. Research on the MTAs had yet to grapple with the state power background and the institutional linkages that nourished their existence.

In other words, I decided it was crucial to try and tell the MTAs' history through the key actors, events, and policy processes surrounding their initial emergence under a Left-Wing municipal government's Administration and subsequent development under chavismo. Once I

began to dig into the policy history, the project changed for good. For instance, the definition of what I considered relevant data expanded considerably. The question was not only what the MTAs did as groups but also what conditions had shaped their history of emergence, submergence, and redevelopment. Thus, instead of developing testable comparative theory about these groups, I unpacked existing conceptions about what the MTAs represented and where they came from. These change in focus produced insights with comparative theoretical implications regarding the nature of collective action itself, not to mention the relationship between these processes and populism as an intermediated phenomenon.

Unpacking existing conceptions began with an effort to question the dominant diagnosis that the MTAs represented examples of popular participation. Instead of centering participation, this project centers mobilization of collective action as the central process that characterized the MTAs and associated barrio groups' involvement in policy contexts for community development. The need to change analytic frameworks from participation to mobilization became apparent early on in my fieldwork. In September and October I participated as an observer at two of Hidrocapital's Regional Congresses on Community Water Experiences—conferences held to recap the year's progress in promoting the policy programs of Community Water Management and promote the government's policy agenda. Some years national congresses were held—for example from 2003-2005—but in 2008 only regional Congresses sponsored by water utilities took place. During follow-up field work in August, 2010 I attended another regional Congress hosted by Hidrocapital, providing additional insights into the multilayered relationship between the state water utilities, the government's political interests, and the MTAs. The presence of campaigning politicians from the government's PSUV party at the 2008 Conference and the prominent role of

ideological discourse aligned with Chávez's project of Bolivarian Socialism in the 2010 conference were only the most obvious examples of the top-down nature of the MTAs.

Observing the more day-to-day affairs of the MTAs involved participant observation that took five different forms. First, I attended a total of thirty-seven *Consejo Comunitario del Agua* (Water Community Council, CCA) meetings, in twelve different zones of Caracas, most of them in Libertador municipality but also in Baruta and El Hatillo municipalities. Second, on forty six different occasions, I observed MTA groups, with their activities ranging from MTAs that were still in their formative stages as they initially petitioned the state, as they operated as project managers of community development grants to improve their water service infrastructure, or in their post-project phase of determining a new future for collective action after a development project had changed their outlooks on collective action and state-society relations more broadly. This entailed observing twenty different MTAs and thirty-four semi-structured interviews, mostly of MTA leaders. Eight of the MTAs I directly observed were groups that had received or were working on development projects. I obtained varying levels of administrative information about these projects from Hidrocapital—a copy of the memorandum of understanding that served as the project agreement, progress notes about the projects maintained by Hidrocapital, or, in the best case, the whole project file, which entailed a history of the MTA from its formation to its completion of a project. Supplementing these insights of the MTAs I also observed eleven Communal Council groups in the same three phases of development.

Third, I participated as an observer at five daylong, state-managed workshops for MTAs and Communal Councils. These workshops addressed different themes—teaching the steps to assembly a Communal Council, classes on how to administer project funds, targeted classes on promoting accountability in terms of community leaders informing the broader population of local

residents about project progress, and discussions on what broader meanings collective action in the MTAs held for incorporating popular sector actors into policy programs.

Fourth, when I learned of an on-the spot meetings taking place in a community I was visiting, a fairly regular occurrence actually, I tried to attend, conditions permitting. I usually learned about such meetings during interviews with community leaders or while observing a group's meetings or community service activities. These more spontaneous examples of observation, of which there were twenty, involved attending meetings concerning some processes that never advanced very far, such as, municipal assemblies on participatory budgeting or related planning meetings. More commonly, the meetings had to do with the Social Missions, the Communal Councils, the Urban Land Committees, the Parish Government Council, and, as of 2009, meetings of the Communes—small federations of a handful of Communal Councils—at the bimonthly meeting of the *Sala de Batalla Social* (Assembly for Ideological Struggle). The more spontaneous examples also included three observations of opposition government-sponsored spaces for collective action in the barrios and and three conversations with officials from Chávez's political party—the *Partido Socialista Unida de Venezuela*—at government hosted conferences or at mobile offices set up in barrio neighborhoods.

Fifth, I shadowed frontline workers at Hidrocapital as they went about their daily routines of promoting the CCA and MTA policy programs. I shadowed six frontline workers, some more than others, and interviewed three former directors of the Community Water Management Office at Hidrocapital. As per my Institutional Review Board agreement with the univeristy, all interviews with public officials are listed according to the persons' names while interviews with private citizens are anonymous. In the bibliography, all interviews are coded by number and listed chronologically. In the text I cite by the interviewee's name and the number of the interview if the

interviewee is a public official. The names of private citizens are changed in the text but the neighborhood names are the real places.

Beyond participant observation insights, I also used content analysis to track what I observed in the street and learned how the state was in a sense digesting these processes through formal procedures and through its communication outlets. This involved creating an organizational history of Hidrocapital through its various official publications—press releases, newsletters, and a semi-monthly magazine called Vertientes. An important product of my research is a partial archive of Hidrocapital activities from 1999-2010. The archive includes the following contents: a nearly complete library of the utility's magazine Vertientes, Planning Department records on the progress of projects and the year-to-year financial outlays to community development programs under *Gestión Comunitario del Agua*, copies of project fields for individual six different MTA-managed community development projects, inter-institutional memos and correspondences regarding financing arrangements, utility informational pamphlets for promoting the Councils, miscellaneous newsletters about developments in the water sector, and copies of official power point presentations given by utility spokespersons regarding the progress of the MTAs. Beyond this archive of Hidrocapital materials, I also have press clippings of news regarding water shortages and protests and political platforms over these issues in the country's major news outlets.

Elite interviews of nineteen people provided the research with an overarching view of what was taking place at Hidrocapital and in Venezuela under chavismo more broadly. Interviewees ranged in their background, including academics, newspaper editors, retired politicians, labor and business leaders, active politicians, and current and former policy makers in the water sector.<sup>1</sup> I

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond the field research in 2008 and 2009 and my follow-up trip in 2010, I also returned to Venezuela in the capacity of consultant to the Carter Center when the organization carried out election study missions to the 2012 and 2013 Presidential elections.

also surveyed the main national press outlets on a daily basis, as well as international outlets covering the country. A list of consulted newspapers is in the bibliography.

Synthesizing information from street-level participant observation and more formal resulted in grounded theoretical insights of three kinds: insights about the ideas and institutions underlying Chavismo's populism, the importance of collaborative leaderships and the precarious nature of group-based collective action in urban popular sector settings, and how unpacking the context-specific nature of politicization processes over space and time can provide the insights for painting a nuanced picture of the complex institutional environment that results amid the overlapping of partisan and state-based mobilization processes—three themes I develop in Chapter six's discussion of my project's contributions to a research agenda on populism.

### *Roadmap*

This methodological narrative tells the story of the research and conceptual processes underlying this project. The first section describes how I initially became aware of the highly relevant network history associated with the officials who promoted the MTAs under Chávez. The second section analyzes some challenges of participant observation with the state. It addresses the challenges I faced as a foreigner from the United States attempting to building a reputation as a researcher interested in positioning myself at a waist-deep level of immersion. I illustrate these challenges by recounting emblematic experiences of my two main research methods—participant observation of the state at public water forums held at the community level and conducting unstructured interviews with community activist. The third section discusses how I stepped back from the context of waist deep immersion in the institutional context around Hidrocapital,



developed alternative networks to obtain a complementary set of insights, and gained a more elevated view through content analysis and formal elite interviews.

### I. Through the State: Digging Down to the MTAs

My affiliation with research centers at the *Universidad Central de Venezuela* (UCV) and the *Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administración* (IESA) did not provide direct access to data about this policy process or to the frontline workers at Hidrocapital. A two person research team at the UCV, where I had an affiliation, had published descriptive essays on the MTAs (Cariola and Lacabana, 2007). But, they protected ‘the territory’ of their fieldwork very closely and demonstrated no interest in exchanging information. They did not share how they obtained their information and made clear I needed to do my own fieldwork, that is, without a helping hand.

More fruitful conversations with Venezuelan academics who conducted fieldwork on different popular sector organizations led me to conclude that I had to build relationships with Hidrocapital to locate subjects for interviews. There was no sample from which to select and contacting subjects via an impersonal mailing or contracted field survey team were not viable options, they told me. Establishing such contacts, they told me, was how they had gained access to subjects on the ground. Fellow researchers were not particularly self-conscious about the methodological nature of this approach. In practice they suggested I contact popular sector organizations via their state interlocutors.

Ethically leveraging such a strategy requires making explicit that insights are obtained via human networks and that an observer effect is a fact of interpretation. My initial contact at Hidrocapital was Gerldine Rodriguez, a frontline worker on the Community Water Management Office staff. Geraldine knew a friend of mine who I had met during a 2002 research trip to Caracas as a research associate of the Council on Foreign Relations Latin American program, and she

happily introduced me to Victor Díaz, Director of the Community Water Management Office. Díaz immediately understood my research project thanks to recent interactions he had with a Brazilian sociologist conducting research on the MTAs. Díaz invited me to join him on field visits to barrio neighborhoods to follow one of his two regular routines: promoting the creation of CCA forums or MTA group or stewarding already existing forums and relationships with MTAs. Within a couple of weeks of making Díaz's acquaintance I had accompanied him on four field visits. The research project's focus began to shift.

After developing a rapport with Díaz, I asked about official data regarding the MTAs. He told me that no official registry of the MTAs in the Caracas Metropolitan area existed, something I then doubted since a 2001 Law on Potable Water and Sanitation called for water utilities to maintain just such a list (LOPSAPS, 2001, Article 75). Five months after meeting Díaz the search for the census continued in vain. But, Díaz opened his rolodex and introduced me to his predecessors—the two former Directors of Community Water Management. These two individuals, Santiago Arconada and Manuel González, had participated in LCR's Governing from the Parish initiative before working at Hidrocapital to steer Community Water Management. In other words, these contacts were key members of the water policy network. As I interviewed Arconada and González, I began to realize I had the opportunity to obtain a rich set of insights about state-society relations between Hidrocapital frontline workers and prospective or historical MTA group leaders.

### *Uncovering a Network's Existence*

A cohort of Leftwing engineers and neighborhood activists had become well acquainted while helping foster political party '*La Causa R's*' (The Radical Cause, LCR) Governing From the Parish initiative in Libertador, the main municipality of Caracas, 1992-1995. Under Chávez,

they became frontline workers at Hidrocapital's Community Water Management Office or senior leaders at the utility—the President and Vice-President of Hidrocapital. Their appointment was symptomatic of the role that historical Left-wing civilian groups, particularly individuals hailing from LCR, played in the Chávez administration (Goldfrank, 2011a).

None of the members of this network foregrounded this relational history. In fact, there seemed to exist a kind of taboo about discussing this shared background. Whether it concerned the fact that people in a network are likely to emphasize the mutual interests that bring them together rather than their strong personal relationship, out of a need to justify their collaboration based on legitimate reasons for interaction, or that this background was simply part of the past, the underlying relationships did not feature prominently in discussions about Community Water Management and the MTAs. In this respect, discovering the existence of this network required some digging around before I could attempt to connect the data points into a social map.

It bears underscoring that I would have been much less likely to decipher the existence of this network without intensive field work. Moreover, when I turned the lens on the state itself, I not only tracked the process of implementing Community Water Management policy by developing a careful understanding of the policy programs—installing Water Communal Council forums and promoting the creation of MTA groups. A central part of tracking policy implementation entailed developing insights about the routines frontline workers I followed in the course of disseminating and promoting these policy programs in their daily activities as Hidrocapital employees.

## II. Reputation Building Challenges and Waist-Deep Immersion

Though Victor was generous in helping me to establish contacts, establishing a degree of trust with Hidrocapital employees was challenging. The first obstacle was to overcome skepticism of my interests as a foreigner outsider conducting research in a country governed by a self-defined revolutionary movement. Months into my extended field stay, President Chávez expelled the U.S. Ambassador to Caracas during a hyper-nationalist speech in which he used a four letter epithet to describe the Ambassador and ‘yankees’ more broadly (*El Pais*, September 12, 2008).<sup>2</sup> This event did not make the climate for research any better but, fortunately, it did not create new obstacles for research. Rather, the fact Chávez had expelled the U.S. Ambassador in such an undiplomatic fashion drove home the extent of the challenge: I needed to take precautions while building a reputation as a researcher.

To build a reputation, I decided to try and make a name for myself as a serious researcher. I attempted to accomplish this through demonstrating commitment to the project. Demonstrating research professionalism meant repeatedly explaining the purpose of my researcher as a graduate student in political science, listening carefully at meetings, arriving on time to scheduled meetings and staying until they finished, and showing patience when logistical problems developed and meetings or interviews had to be rescheduled. It also required, I would argue, showing some normative support for the initiative.

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<sup>2</sup> <[http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2008/09/12/actualidad/1221170409\\_850215.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2008/09/12/actualidad/1221170409_850215.html)> My fieldwork received support from Fulbright and the Inter-American Foundation, two U.S. government foundations. I had a courtesy visa thanks to cultural affairs cooperation between the State Department and the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and did not confront any unusual problems in the course of renewing the visa. In 2007, a Fulbright recipient in Bolivia reported he received pressure from U.S. Embassy officials in La Paz to brief embassy staff on his findings. I was not subjected to any pressure from the U.S. Embassy in Caracas. Moreover, though the Cultural Affairs attache thought my project concerned ‘chavista policies,’ he and his staff came to two of my research presentations at Venezuelan universities.

I use the word normative carefully here. Normative support meant not only expressing hope that provision of potable water service could be expanded to historically neglected shantytowns but also voicing carefully calibrated support for these policy programs as a useful means to achieve the objectives of community developmental, greater consciousness about water service, and appreciation for the institutional resources available. Thus, showing normative support for the initiative entailed more than becoming an expert about policy—knowing the history of the policy experience, learning the official three step criteria of census, blueprint, and diagnostic proposal for establishing the MTAs, and demonstrating some technical understanding of water problems in barrio shantytowns. It also meant expressing belief in the promise of participatory-based solutions for community development.

These efforts, which did in fact reflect an application of some principles I believed in, proved fruitful for building a reputation as a serious researcher concerned with reporting the facts on the ground in relation to the goal of policy programs. Six of the seven frontline workers employed by Hidrocapital during my fieldwork invited me to join them on their field visits. However, one frontline worker who expressed deep skepticism of the United States and also questioned the integrity of researchers from American universities, did not accept the legitimacy of my research project. This person, whose professional relationship with Victor seemed strong, never invited me to join him on his field visits.

### *Shadowing Frontline Workers: Insights and Implications of Waist Deep Immersion*

Shadowing frontline workers placed me in a position to personally witness these officials' efforts to promote the Community Water Management policy programs of installing CCA forums and stimulating the formation of MTA groups. Chapters 3 and 5 offer detailed descriptions of what policy promotion routines entailed for senior level officials at Hidrocapital and for frontline

workers. I only shadowed the latter. By shadow I refer to accompanying state frontline workers in their daily activities at work in order to gain insight into their job's operation.

Four frontline workers were particularly receptive to my interest in their work and they generously showed me the ropes. They also gave me the basic outline of their work schedules by providing me the information about the schedule for meetings and the logistics of transportation. This helped institutionalize my relationship to the policy process. For example, I knew that every Wednesday of the second week of the month a CCA meeting would be held at predefined place and time, rain or shine. I could arrive early to meetings and speak with participants independently. True, I usually met these people via me Díaz or the frontline worker in the zone. This relationship with the state was an unescapable part of the context when I privately interviewed participants.

### *Observing Community Water Forums and Conducting Unstructured Interviews*

Hidrocapital designed Community Water Councils (CCAs) as parish-level public forums for potable water and sanitation issues. Theoretically, Hidrocapital should be represented at these forums by the local frontline worker for the neighborhood zone, a utility-employed engineer whose primary responsibilities concerned maintenance of the local infrastructure and making emergency repairs, and an engineer for the private interest contracted to operate the local pumping station. Generally, CCA meetings took place at public venues located in community spaces and the local frontline worker assigned to the parish area had the responsibility to generate awareness of the forum.

The idea was that Hidrocapital would establish a place and time for these CCA meetings after opening lines of communication with interested local residents. For example, CCA meetings were held every other Wednesday at the multipurpose recreation centers in Antimano and in Los

Frailes, a neighborhood in the large Catia district; every other Thursday at the Community Clinic in El Valle; every other Tuesday at schoolhouses in Nuevo Horizonte and Brisas de Propatria, and monthly at the offices of the elected parish government in Las Minas, Baruta. With the exception of the parish government offices in Las Minas, which were formal parts of the state system, all these spaces evoked some form of community spirit. Local groups sponsored recreation leagues; adult education at night, religious meetings, or open agenda community meetings provided the spark for these venues to operate as vibrant hubs of neighborhood life. In other words, in these spaces, the state was re-presented by individual employees while ‘the community’ was represented by the social institutions of the neighborhood.

My research strategy did not entail full, ‘neck-deep’ immersion—e.g., living with a family, or in an apartment, in the local barrio (Schatz, 2009). My attempt to become partially immersed in the policy process, that is, to be immersed in the local environment to the waist deep-level, entailed a strategy of maintaining critical distance from both state and society. This strategy attempted to produce multiple sets of insights, each of which contained layers of meaning filtered through the local actors (Weeden, 2009). The idea was not to tell universal truths but to be self-aware of how relationships to a community could shape one’s perspective and counteract the negative impacts of potential bias by seeking multiple points of view.

### *The Antimano Communal Water Council*

Victor Díaz, the director of Community Affairs at Hidrocapital, had told me I should meet him at the Hidrocapital offices Wednesday at 5 PM. He did not tell me the purpose of this appointment but I knew that the CCA meeting in Antimano was scheduled for that evening.<sup>3</sup> I had

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<sup>3</sup> The CCA-Antimano meeting was held once every two weeks while CCAs in some other parishes met every month. Generally speaking, parishes where water problems were particularly problematic, such as Antimano where

attended a couple of CCA-Antimano meetings already but was still gaining my footing as a participant observer. Victor came walking out of his office at around 5:45PM, and alongside him was Luisa Pabón, who I was then introduced to as an important person to meet for my research project.

Middle-aged, five feet tall, and no more than one hundred and twenty pounds, Luisa Pabón was a diminutive figure. But, with her ear-to-ear smile, ebullient intonation, and sturdy rhetoric she projected confidence and energy when she introduced herself to me. Later, at other public fora where she spoke, Luisa commanded the floor as if she were the leader of the meeting. Luisa took control of the conversation as soon as we met walking out the door of the Hidrocapital offices to pile into a state-rented pickup truck to attend the Antimano parish Water Community Council (CCA) forum that Wednesday. Once in the pickup truck and chatting away about life, she said, “Michael, we are married to the revolution,” before then bursting out into laughter about how her involvement in community development had taken over her life.

We had not left downtown Caracas early enough to avoid rush hour, and had some time to kill. Luisa began to tell me what the CCA was about. She described the CCA as a vibrant space where concerned residents, such as herself, gathered to complain about water problems and make petitions for state assistance in fixing these problems. Clearly, was speaking in platitudes. Victor was in the car, as well as a state employed driver and the engineer we picked up along the way. Nevertheless, amid the generalities, there were some clues into what relationships between a MTA leader and a frontline worker of Victor’s stature tended to be like. Luisa’s rapport with Victor suggested the two had developed a close relationship. They were comfortable speaking to each

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residents sometimes received water only once every thirty days, had CCA meetings every two weeks while places such as Las Minas, in Baruta, where most residents received water service on a weekly basis, hosted CCA meetings once every month.



other in very direct terms and Luisa made several jokes about how much time and energy participation in the MTA and in the CCA spaces required. This kept the mood light in a context pregnant with power relations.

We pulled up to the Carapita multipurpose center forty-five minutes later, and all headed for the meeting. A crowd of around thirty persons had already gathered. I walked in to the classroom behind Victor and Luisa, who each pulled up their own chairs to join the circle of participants that had gathered. The meeting attendees did not appear to be displeased by Victor's late arrival; he had notified the Hidrocapital engineer assigned to the parish, Antonio Ochoa, we would be late. Ochoa had already been talking with attendees about the problems they had faced this last week. Unlike other CCA meetings in which the conversation proceeding the sessions concerned politics, popular culture, or neighborhood affairs, this one was already focused.

After apologizing for the inconvenience he caused by arriving late, Victor introduced me, and called on me to say a few words. I had attended this CCA forum a few times before but had barely begun to recognize peoples' faces and remember names. I had not conducted any in-depth interviews with participants outside the forum yet. I did my best to explain the purpose of my presence, describing that my fieldwork concerned a doctoral research project and how I hoped to be invited to participate as an observer at this forum for the coming year so that I could become a kind of expert of this meeting's process, the MTAs, and Hidrocapital's Community Water Management policy. Since the meeting was already starting late, no one seemed to care very much about the project and my introduction generated little response. Usually when I attended a CCA forum for the first time, I was asked to explain more about the project's funding and my institutional affiliation.

The meeting began in its customary fashion, with a discussion of the length of time between service delivery. Meeting attendees informed the Hidrocapital staff where they lived and the last date they received water service. One community resident took careful notes to maintain a local record of service delivery frequency on a block-by-block basis. This discussion got people talking about the issue of the moment but not in a contentious manner.

After brief reports from Hidrocapital engineers and the system operator about why the cycle may have been longer or shorter, Díaz asked people to raise their hands if they wanted to speak. Luisa went first. She offered some kind words for Hidrocapital, noting that in *La Pedrera*, her home sector in Antimano, there was an ongoing construction project to improve the water service lines. She concluded by noting that soon, she hoped, the entire parish would benefit from better quality water service. A few residents that attended all the CCA meetings knew about the project, which was taking place on a hilltop well far from the Carapita multipurpose center and well out of sight of most residents. But, most attendees did not know about the project, nor were they very much interested in the MTA groups. Rather, they raised questions about household-level problems—a broken distribution line on the street they lived, a leak that was producing a foul smell on the block, a leak that resulted in water running down the city street, a new housing construction that was affecting the distribution of water on the block.

In addition to mobilizing collective action in MTAs, establishing direct lines of communication for household-level problem-solving was a main objective of the CCA forums. Many of these problems concerned very micro-scale issues that could be dealt with by Ochoa and his work crew as part of their weekly maintenance work. But the purpose of the forum was also to include the Community Affairs office in this process. Díaz kept a record of complaints so that he could follow-up with Ochoa and residents about progress. His job was often to mediate disputes

between residents and Ochoa about scheduling an appointment or about whether the problem fell within Hidrocapital's jurisdiction—some urban development problems were the concern of the municipality, for example. Meetings got heated when Díaz and Ochoa fought about whether or not the latter was being responsive enough to petitions made via the CCA forum. These sometimes lengthy exchanges could change the mood of the meeting, as Díaz and Ochoa would start to bicker with each other. For the most part, exchanges between community residents and the state were civil. Díaz's goal, of course, was to be receptive to these complaints and show a willingness to try and help make the state more responsive. In other words, the rubber hit the road after the meetings, when Hidrocapital either followed through or not.

Generally speaking, such meetings lasted around an hour. But, they could, and often did, go on for much longer. Meetings tended to run long if agreements could not be reached about what practical steps should be taken in light of the fact that repairs had not been completed as efficiently as promised. These discussions concerned not only scheduling matters but also the details of explaining why Hidrocapital had limited resources, was overburdened by the number of requests for service improvements on top of its regular maintenance work, faced restrictions associated with 'Mother Nature,' and could not respond as rapidly as it might like.

If the meeting ended past 9 PM I looked for a ride home or called a taxi. If it ended earlier I risked the walk down to the metro station and took the subway home. The security precautions I took did not seem to create distance between myself and the research subjects. They too took security precautions and so they could understand my concerns.

### *In Due Course: Recognition and Acceptance of Participant Observation*

No particularly significant development took place at this CCA-Antimano meeting. For me, though, every observation counted toward the broader goals of the project. From the

perspective of the research project, the goal was to make my participant observation an accepted part of the CCA routine. It took three months before I knew almost all the regular attendees by face and name. In becoming more familiar with the meeting's proceedings I gained the respect of its attendees as a researcher. Mrs. Florence and Rossana, the two longtime participants who almost never missed a meeting and sometimes substituted for Victor in leading the session if he going to arrive very late, learned who I was. A warm introduction from them carried some weight. If they introduced me to other meeting attendees this strengthened my reputation as a devoted observer of the process. Luisa did not actually attend CCA-Antimano meetings very often. Her leadership of MTA La Pedrera's water project meant she already spent about half of every day thinking and talking about things water. The time consuming work of the project limited her participation in the CCA-Antimano forum, and so I visited her in *La Pedrera* to gain a better sense of what the MTA group form looked like in the everyday.

### *Interviewing MTA Leaders in their Element*

The day I met Miguel and Genesis, a married couple who were elected co-directors of the MTA '*Calle Siete*' (Seventh Street), I also ate lunch with them in their home. This occasion developed when I participated as an observer of a state delegation that toured Nuevo Horizonte to speak with residents about a new government social assistance program, *La Mision 13 de April* (The April 13 Mission).<sup>4</sup> Hidrocapital had sent César González, a frontline worker, to participate in the community visit and he already had good contacts in Nuevo Horizonte. Cesar was the steward of the CCA in the neighborhood and he had cultivated a strong professional relationship

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<sup>4</sup> This mission memorialized the day—April 13, 2002—when a coup against Chávez was aborted amid military groups removing support for the interim government and popular protests to restore the President. The government initiated the Missions two months ahead of October 2008 regional elections for Mayors and Governors, and it concerned urban development needs for the poorest populations.

with Miguel and Genesis, who served as the unofficial hosts for the state delegation visiting that day. Cesar was already familiar with the streets of Nuevo Horizonte so he did not join me as I walked around the neighborhood gaining a firsthand look at development conditions. The tour started and ended at the home of Miguel and Genesis, where we had coffee and a modest meal of pasta and some meat. When I was leaving Nuevo Horizonte that day, Miguel asked me when I would come back so we could talk without a crowd around.

Over the next few months, I visited Nuevo Horizonte a handful of times. Traveling there by bus entailed an hour and a half commute. It became necessary to make numerous return visits since interviewing Miguel and Genesis was extremely trying. Both of them practiced an extreme version of multi-tasking. They never compartmentalized their work so as to work exclusively on the task at hand, including the task of least direct importance, our interviews.

I always met Miguel at his home, which was also his office. Before we could begin an in depth discussion, an interruption of some kind always seemed to occur. Miguel would receive a visiting neighbor, he would have to go follow-up on a project started down the block, one of his family members needed something, or we would run out of time before he had to dash off to a meeting in a different part of the neighborhood. He was a tough interview because he was so mobile. The longest conversation we sustained was while taking a tour of different blocks of the neighborhood, where we passed the office built for housing the Cuban medical mission called '*Barrio Adentro*' (Inside the Neighborhood) and visited different neighbors making repairs to their homes and their service lines. But, at the same time, the observations I made during these attempts at interviews helped me capture him in his social milieu and in his working environment. Ultimately, these observations added up to one long unstructured interview in which I took note not only of things he said but also of the wide range of activities he spearheaded as the leader of a

construction crew or sponsored as the head of the *Banco Communal* (Communal Bank) when he and Genesis used their home as the de facto office place for the Nuevo Horizonte Communal Council they founded in 2008.

Miguel joked with me, asking how things were in ‘*Gringolandia*’ (Gringo-land), a description of the U.S. that seemed to conjure a fantasy world of prosperity and cultural materialism. He also let me know my place in more direct ways. He commonly introduced me to neighbors as the “guy Bush sent”—a reference to then President George W. Bush, who Chávez described as the devil during a famous speech at the United Nations in 2006. These bits of humor seemed to both keep the mood light and remind me of our completely different personal backgrounds and social networks. When Miguel mocked me he added a dose of political reality to our working relationship.

Genesis was less prone to practical jokes than Miguel, and, she was a bit easier to hold still for a conversation. She always seemed to be operating two telephones at once, organizing one meeting with a text while addressing a different issue with a phone call on the other. But, she was not the public spokesperson for the group. Miguel had the job of speaking to the press or offering remarks at a Hidrocapital organized event. Genesis was all business. When we spoke she mostly asked me questions about what was going on at Hidrocapital—what sorts of gossip I had heard, what developments seemed relevant, and how important Cesar was to helping the community in Nuevo Horizonte.

The only time I was able to speak with the both of them at the same time we were sharing some food at their kitchen table. The moment’s characteristics seemed to produce an over-determined storyline. It seemed inappropriate to try and get them to discuss the complexities of

basing community development work in their home. The potential problems were so evident that they did not need to be stated explicitly at the time and place.

Experiences of participating in contexts such as these set into relief the fact that both Miguel and Genesis were fully in control while in their elements. This in turn suggested to me two important points. One, their leadership had accomplished a great deal in Nuevo Horizonte—their close relationships with Hidrocapital officials helped neighbors establish lines of communication with the state for their budding organizational efforts and when I returned to the neighborhood for follow-up field work a ‘*Casa Communal*’ (Communal House) had been built across the street from their home. The Communal House complex contained a computer center, a library studded with books sponsored by the government, a kitchen for the daycare center, and a public hall type meeting place. Years later, the *Casa Communal* served as a polling place in the 2012 Presidential elections. Two, though their leadership provided a social foundation for the state to establish some presence, the intermediating institutional link was missing. The social origins of the space as something founded by individuals was not the problem. Rather, the challenge was converting the space into a publicly managed venue.

### III. An Elevated View: The Opposition, Elites, Content Analysis and Data

The 2008 municipal elections produced some important changes at the municipal level in Caracas. The opposition mayoral candidate Carlos Ocariz won the race for Mayor in Sucre, defeating the incumbent pro-government party of President Chávez in 2007—the *Partido Socialista Unidad de Venezuela* (PSUV). Ocariz’s victory generated great buzz because his success in Sucre suggested the opposition could be competitive in the country’s densely populated urban barrios and among the poor more broadly (Lupu, 2010). Sucre includes Petare, the largest

barrio neighborhood in the country, and the municipality had been considered a government stronghold.

*Politics and the Battle over Community Water in Sucre, Caracas*

The PSUV candidates won reelection in Libertador, where Hidrocapital had complete jurisdiction over water affairs. In Sucre, though, there existed a shared arrangement between two water authorities. Hidrocapital pumped water to the Sucre municipality-administered *Instituto Municipal de Aguas de Sucre* (IMAS), which had the responsibility to distribute water services and fulfill maintenance and operations responsibilities. IMAS also had a staff of community affairs officers who directly interacted with residents in Sucre concerning water issues there. In the interim period after the election results came in, but before the change of power took place, I met the outgoing director of Community Affairs. When we met, he looked completely depressed about the election result and the fact he would soon be out of a job. His successor, he feared, would reverse the progress he had made in promoting *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* in Sucre.

The new President of IMAS temporarily closed the Community Affairs office while the agency underwent restructuring. The succeeding Community Affairs director took office two months after the new administration gained power. Promoting MTAs was no longer part of his mandate, as, they were not, he told me, the best community instrument for improving neighborhood relationships with the water authority. Instead, the new IMAS administration would not follow a specific model of community organization since this resulted in a top-down model of participation. The new IMAS, he proclaimed, would simply listen to the people.

When I participated as an observer with the new IMAS Community Affairs team on their visits to barrios, the neighborhood assemblies did not feature robust participation from former MTA leaders demanding their voices be heard by the new authorities. Rather, most participants



simply wanted to discuss practical issues pertaining to the quality of service. The IMAS staff did not have an established policy formula for engaging in community outreach. They instead wagered that more efficient water service would help build social peace in the water sector.

Part of the reason the IMAS-convened meetings did not generate much participation from MTA activists is that Hidrocapital and other water policy leaders at Hidroven began to expand their jurisdiction and recruit MTA participants in Sucre. Until the Ocariz administration had taken power, in early 2009, I had not heard Hidrocapital employees discuss efforts to establish relationships with MTA groups in Sucre. Thus, Hidrocapital's initiative of penetrating Sucre clearly smacked of subversion.

Relations between IMAS and Hidrocapital deteriorated rapidly. The two exchanged criticisms of neglect and Hidrocapital sponsored a number of protests by MTA activists against the IMAS administration. On one occasion when engaging in participant observation with IMAS, I witnessed a confrontation between the IMAS and Hidrocapital Presidents. The Hidrocapital President, who I knew by face from different events sponsored by the utility, but had yet to interview, made an unannounced appearance at a meeting IMAS held at a small reservoir it operated. Hidrocapital President Hitcher stormed into the meeting and a loud shelling match broke out over who had the legitimate authority to preside over this meeting with the community. The incident was awkward for my status as I also saw Victor there. He never mentioned my presence there. Perhaps he was not surprised. He knew that I had developed an interest in the extent to which the change in administration at IMAS would produce change in its relations with organized popular groups in Sucre. When I interviewed Hidrocapital President Hitcher, he commented to me that "we had a little problem before," an observation I interpreted as a reference to this event now being behind us.

Thus, my participant observation with IMAS placed my relationships with Hidrocapital in some danger. But, learning these relationships could be jeopardized was arguably worth the cost of having to go through this nervy encounter. My participant observation with IMAs confirmed three facts—the MTAs did exist in jurisdictions governed by water authorities besides Hidrocapital—the original sponsor of the groups, but their endurance depended on the political support of the administration; the MTAs were not federated in any kind of way that would allow some coordinating mechanism to prevent them from being co-opted and becoming parts of institutional turf battles over governing water in Caracas; and as the opposition became more competitive at the ballot box, the Chávez government grew more radical in guardedly protecting the groups as exclusive policy products of its revolutionary program.

Examples of the Chávez government ‘branding’ the MTAs as chavista organizations made it nearly impossible for independent water engineers and consultants to accept the groups as legitimate forms of community participation. Although these experts did not have a very detailed understanding of the policy context surrounding the groups, they had solid evidence for questioning the groups’ legitimacy as forms of free participation. Water consultant Maria Elena Corrales expressed deep skepticism of the MTAs, as did a former Hidroven Vice-President, and former Hidrocapital President Jose Maria de Viana. The President of IMAS under the Ocariz administration recognized the value of the principles behind the groups but rejected the implementation methods used to guide their practice. All four experts argued the MTAs represented an inefficiency in that Hidrocapital’s sponsorship of the groups implied diverting precious resources away from technical studies or maintenance projects. In other words, the polarized context and Hidrocapital’s meddling in opposition affairs made it very difficult to have a nuanced conversation about the strengths and weaknesses of the groups.

### *The Last, and most Fruitful, Phase of Data Collection*

The last phase of my research proved very fruitful for obtaining data sources. After receiving no response from numerous letters formally requesting an interview from Hidrocapital Alejandro Hitcher, I tracked him down in a social setting. At the conclusion of an event to promote a new round of funding for community water development projects sponsored by Jacqueline Faria, then the head of the District Capital government authority appointed by Chávez, and a former President of Hidrocapital, I asked Hitcher if we might find a time to talk the coming Monday. I had expected another blank stare, like the many I received before after making requests for an interview or contact with colleagues. Instead, he smiled and said to show up at his office Monday at 1 PM.

The interview opened many other doors for me at Hidrocapital. First of all, office staff throughout the utility became aware of the fact that I had been granted an interview with Hitcher. This helped me to get access to the Media department's archives for *Vertientes* Magazine—a quarterly digest of Hidrocapital activities that was not publicly available at the utility's library. The magazine offered the official version of events but nonetheless it contained very useful information for tracking the development of the policy from 1999 to the present. The bulk of my content analysis data about Hidrocapital came from these archives. I am fairly certain that my interview with Hitcher helped my chances for gaining access to these materials, which were offered to me after the interview, that is, without me requesting them.

Second, during my interview with Hitcher he suggested I schedule a meeting with the Director of Planning for the Community Affairs department. This meeting, held in September 2009, with only three months to go in my field stay, proved central to gaining some historical perspective on Hidrocapital's five different phases of Community Water Project Financing from

2005 to 2009. The director of this office warmly responded to my requests to review the ‘records’ her office kept on project progress and the location of these projects. This was the data I needed in the early phases. Though I had received it too late in the fieldwork process to start a rigorous case study I had enough time to pore over it and make sure that I made contact with or interviewed MTA activists who had received funding in all five of the funding phases. Access to this information allowed me to trace the process of funding MTAs over time and to expand the materials reviewed for content analysis—e.g., project agreements signed between Hidrocapital and MTA organizations, and inter-institutional memoranda of understanding that outlined the terms for transferring funds and sharing responsibilities.

## Appendix B

### List of Interviews

1. Community Leader, Antimano, Libertador, Caracas, October 4, 2008
2. Community Leader, Las Minas, Baruta, Caracas, October 16, 2008
3. Community Leader, Campo Rico, Sucre, Caracas, October 20
4. Women's Rights Activist, Libertador, Caracas October 24, 2008
5. Women's Rights Activist, Libertador, Caracas October 24, 2008
6. Employee, Hidrocapital, Caracas, November 3, 2008
7. University Professor, Universidad Simon Bolívar, November 7, 2008
8. University Professor, Universidad Catolica Andres Bello, November 14, 2008
9. Employee, ICLAM, State Water Company-Maracaibo, Zulia, November 19
10. Employee, ICLAM, State Water Company-Maracaibo, Zulia November
11. Community Activist, Maracaibo, Zulia, November 21, 2008
12. Ex-President Hidroven, Caracas, November 25, 2008
13. Employee, IMAS Water Utility-Sucre Municipality, December 1, 2008
14. University Professor, Urban Architect, December 5, 2008
15. Consultant, Hidrocapital and Hidroven, December 12, 2008
16. Community Activist, Sucre, Caracas, December 15, 2008
17. Former state employee, Hidrocapital, Libertador, Caracas, January 12, 2009
18. Political activist, Libertador, Caracas, January 26, 2009
19. Consultant, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, D.C., February 3, 2009
20. Community Activist, La Pastora, Libertador, Caracas, February 23, 2009

21. Employee, IMAS Water Utility, Sucre, Caracas, April 15, 2009
22. Employee, Municipal Administration of Sucre, Caracas, April 22, 2009
23. President, IMAS Water Utility, Sucre, Caracas, May 8
24. President, Hidrocapital, Libertador, May 18, 2009
25. University Professor, Universidad Central de Venezuela, May 19, 2009
26. Community Activist, Libertador, Caracas
27. Employee, State Engineer, Hidrocapital, June 15, 2009
28. Employee, Community Affairs, Hidrocapital, June 23, 2009
29. Community Activist, El Junquito Parish, Libertador, Caracas, July 13, 2009
30. Employee, State Planning Foundation, Caracas, July 15, 2009
31. Employee, Hidrocapital, July 22, 2009
32. Community Activist, Antimano, Libertador, Caracas, August 7, 2009
33. Community Activist, La Candelaria, Libertador, Caracas, August 11, 2009
34. Employee, Hidroven, Libertador, Caracas, August 17, 2009
35. Community Activist, Antimano, Libertador, Caracas, August 19, 2009
36. Community Activist, Antimano, Libertador, Caracas, August 19, 2009
37. Community Activist, Antimano, Libertador, August 24, 2009
38. Employee, State Agency SAFONAAC, Libertador, Caracas August, 31, 2009
39. Employee, State Agency, FUNDACOMUNAL, Libertador, Caracas, September 3, 2009
40. Community Activist, La Candelaria, Libertador, Caracas, September 7, 2009
41. Community Activist, Sucre Parish, Libertador, Caracas, September 10, 2009
42. Employee, SAFONAAC, Sucre Parish, Libertador, Caracas, September 10, 2009
43. Employee, Hidrocapital, Libertador, Caracas, September 15, 2009

44. Community Activist, El Valle, Libertador, Caracas, September 18, 2009
45. Employee, Hidroven, September 24, 2009
46. Community Activist, Las Minas, Baruta, Caracas, September 28, 2009
47. Employee, Hidrocapital, Caracas, September 30, 2009
48. Community Activist, Las Minas, Baruta, Caracas, October 2, 2009
49. Community Activist, Las Minas Parish, Baruta, Caracas, October 8, 2009
50. Community Activist, Las Minas Parish, Baruta, Caracas, October 8, 2009
51. PSUV Organizer, Libertador, Caracas, October 9, 2009
52. Newspaper Editor, Sucre Municipality, Caracas, October 12, 2009
53. Community Leader, Caricuao Parish, Libertador, Caracas, October 16, 2009
54. Community Leader, 23 de Enero Parish, Libertador, Caracas, October 19, 2009
55. Community Leader, 23 de Enero Parish, Libertador, Caracas, October 19, 2009
56. Community Leader, Las Minas, Baruta, Caracas, October 22, 2009
57. Community Leader, Antimano Parish, Libertador, Caracas, October 23, 2009
58. Community Leader, El Valle, Libertador, Caracas, November 4, 2009
59. Community Leader, 23 de Enero Parish, Libertador, Caracas November 12, 2009
60. Community Leader, Sucre Parish, Liberator, Caracas, November 14, 2009
61. Former Community Leader, Las Minas, Baruta, Caracas, November 25, 2009
62. Federal Deputy from Miranda state, National Assembly, Baltimore, MD, USA May 3, 2011

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- El Mundo
- El Nacional
- El Universal
- noticias24.com
- Tal Cual
- Ultimas Noticias
- Ambiente Magazine (Ministry of the Environment)

## Appendix D. Abbreviations

AD	<i>Acción Democrática</i> (Democratic Action)
AV	<i>Asociaciones de Vecinos</i> (Neighborhood Associations)
CBR	Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic, 1999
CBRs	Circuitos Bolivarianos Revolucionarios, (Revolutionary Bolivarian Circles)
CCs	<i>Consejos Comunales</i> (Communal Councils)
CCA	<i>Consejo Comunitario de Agua</i> (Community Water Councils, CCAs)
CEB	<i>Comunidades Eclesiales del Base</i> (Christian Base Communities, CEBs)
CESAP	Centro al Servicio de la Acción Popular (Center for Popular Action Service)
CGR	Contraloría General de la República (Comptroller General of the Republic)
CLPP	<i>Consejo Local de Planificación Pública</i> (Local Councils for Public Planning, CLPP)
COPEI	<i>Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente—Partido Social Cristiano</i> (Committee of Independent Electoral Political Organization—Social Christian Party)
CORDIPLAN	National Planning Agency
CTU	Comités de Tierra Urbana (Urban Land Committees)
CTV	<i>Centro de Trabajadores Venezolanos</i> (Confederation of Venezuela Workers,
CVP	Corporación Venezolana de Petróleo (Venezuelan Petroleum Corporation)
FEGS	Fundación de Educación y Gestión Social (Foundation for Education and Social Management).
FFM	<i>Frente Francisco de Miranda</i> (Francisco de Miranda Brigade)
GCA	<i>La Gestión Comunitario del Agua</i> (Community Water Management, GCA)
ISI	Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI)
MISIONES	<i>Las Misiones Sociales</i> — Presidentially-sponsored Social Missions)

LAWR	Latin American Weekly Report
LCR	<i>La Causa R</i> (The Radical Cause)
LOPSAPS	Ley Orgánica de Agua Potable y Saneamiento — Organic Law on Potable Water and Sanitation Services
LS	<i>Liga Socialista</i> (Socialist League, LS)
MAS	<i>Movimiento al Socialismo</i> (Movement to Socialism, MAS)
MBR-200	Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario-200 (Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200)
MEB	<i>Movimento de Educação de Base</i> (Movimient for Base Education, MEB)
MIR	<i>Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionario</i> (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR)
MTA	<i>Mesas Técnica de Agua</i> (Technical Water Committees)
MVR	<i>Movimiento Quinta Republica</i> (Fifth Republic Movement, MVR)
PCV	<i>Partido Comunista de Venezuela</i> (Communist Party of Venezuela, PCV)
PDVSA	<i>Petroleos de Venezuela Sociedad Autonomo</i> (P.D.V.S.A.)
PHFB	Programa para la Habilitación Física de los Barrios (Program for the Physical Habilitation of the Barrios)
PPT	<i>Patria Para Todos</i> (Fatherland for All)
PJ	Primero Justicia (First Justice Political Party)
PRV	<i>Partido Revolucionario Venezolano</i> (Venezuelan Revolutionary Party, PRV)
PSUV	<i>Partido Socialista Unitario de Venezuela</i> (The Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV)
SINAMOS	<i>Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social</i> (The National Support System for Social Mobilization)
UCAB	Universidad Catolica de Andres Bello (Catholic University of Andres Bello)
UCV	Universidad Central de Venezuela (Venezuela's Central University)
VTV	<i>Venezolano de Televisión</i> (Venezuelan State Television)



## Appendix E. Communal Spaces and Levels of Government

<i>Sector</i>	Block Level
<i>Barrio</i>	Community
<i>Zona</i>	Neighborhood
<i>Parroquia</i>	Parish/District
<i>Municipio</i>	Municipality
<i>Alcaldía Mayor</i>	Metropolitan Mayor
<i>Estado</i>	Federal State
<i>Gobierno</i>	The National State

## Appendix F: Michael Marx McCarthy

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M.A. Political Science, Johns Hopkins University, 2006

Examination Fields: Comparative Politics, Political Theory

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### TEACHING AND RESEARCH APPOINTMENTS

American University, Center for Latin American and Latino Studies

Research Fellow, Principal Investigator, Venezuela Media Content Analysis

Johns Hopkins University, School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS)—M.A. Level

Professorial Lecturer, “Crisis and Change in the Andean Region,” Spring, 2013 and 2014

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Instructor

“The Turn to the Left in Latin America” (Upper level), Spring 2010

“Introduction to Comparative Politics” (Lower level), Summer 2008

Teaching Assistant

“Ethics of War” (Upper level), Spring 2008

“Introduction to Latin American Politics” (Lower level), Fall 2007

“U.S. Foreign Policy” (Lower level), Spring 2007, Spring 2005

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### PUBLICATIONS

“Challenging the Norm? International Election Accompaniment in Nicaragua and Venezuela,” America Latina Hoy, August 2015, No. 70. Co-authored with Shelley McConnell and Jennifer McCoy

Book Review, “We Created Chávez: A People’s History of the Venezuelan Revolution”  
Forthcoming, The Historian, Winter 2015, 76.4.

“Without Clear Goals, U.S. Sanctions Likely to be Counterproductive,” *World Politics Review*, July 9, 2014

“Venezuela’s Ideologically Diverse Coalition Faces Coordination Challenges,” *World Politics Review*, May 9, 2014

“Venezuela A Test Case for the U.S. to Navigate South America’s New Normal,” *World Politics Review*, April 24, 2014

“The Street Strategy Deepening Venezuela’s Troubles,” *The National Interest*, March 5, 2014

“The Limits of Legacy: The Post-Chávez Challenge and Electoral Legitimacy,” *Americas Quarterly*, Summer 2013

“Despite Uncertainty, Venezuela’s Political Scenarios Not All Bleak,” *World Politics Review*, December 2012 (Co-author with Jennifer McCoy)

“The Possibilities and Limits of Politicized Participation: Community Councils, Coproduction, and Poder Popular in Chávez’s Venezuela,” in Max Cameron, Eric Hershberg, and Ken Sharpe Ed., *New Institutions for Participatory Democracy in Latin America: Voice and Consequence* Palgrave Press, 2012

“Colombia in Partial Collapse,” in *The Andes in Focus: Security, Democracy, and Economic Reform*, Roett Ed., Lynne Reiner Press, 2005 (Julia E. Sweig, co-author)

#### CONFERENCE PAPERS (Selected)

“Scaling Down to Scale Up: Botom-up Mobilization at Chávez’s Hidrocapital, 1999-2004,” Latin American Studies Association, May, 2015.

“Infrastructure Populism: Mobilization, Organization, and Control in Chávismo’s Bolivarian Associative Order,” Mid-Atlantic Latin American Studies Association, March, 2014

“Turn Signals: Assessing election quality and its role in democratic devolution,” American Political Science Association, Chicago, August 2013 (Jennifer McCoy and Shelley McConnell, co-author)

“Electoral Legitimacy and International Norms: Repercussions of the April, 2013 Venezuelan Presidential Elections,” Latin American Studies Association, Washington, DC, May 29, 2013

“The Possibilities and Limits of Politicized Participation: Communal Councils, Coproduction, and *Poder Popular* in Chávez’s Venezuela,” Latin American Studies Association, San Francisco, May 26, 2012

“Coproduction: Participation as a Window into Collective Action and State-Society Relations,” Latin American Studies Association, Toronto, October 2010

“The Practice of Institutionalizing Ideas: Institutionalizing ‘Popular Power’ in Chávez’s Venezuela,” American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2010

#### FELLOWSHIPS AND FIELD RESEAECH

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Fulbright-Institute for International Education Fellowship, 2008-2009

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Visiting Researcher, *Universidad Central de Venezuela*, 2008-2009

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Summer Research Fellowship, Institute for Global Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 2007

Summer Research Fellowship, Latin American Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 2007

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#### PUBLIC LECTURES, CONSULTANCIES AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PUBLICATIONS

“Chavismo Under Pressure: Political and Economic Challenges for Venezuela,”  
Washington Office on Latin America, February 25, 2015

“Venezuela: Prospects for An Uncertain Future,” Inter-American Dialogue,  
August 15, 2014

“Groundhog Day? Implications of Venezuela’s 2012 Presidential Elections,” Council on  
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Senior Political Analyst, Consultant to The Carter Center 2012-2014

- Co-Author, *Study Mission to the 2013 Venezuelan Presidential Elections*, May, 2014
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“*Andes 2020: A New U.S. Strategy for the Challenges of Colombia and the Region*,” The Council on  
Foreign Relations, May 2004 (Julia E. Sweig, co-author)

Commentary for *The Financial Times* ‘Beyond BRICs’ Blog; Venezuela Politics and Human Rights  
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